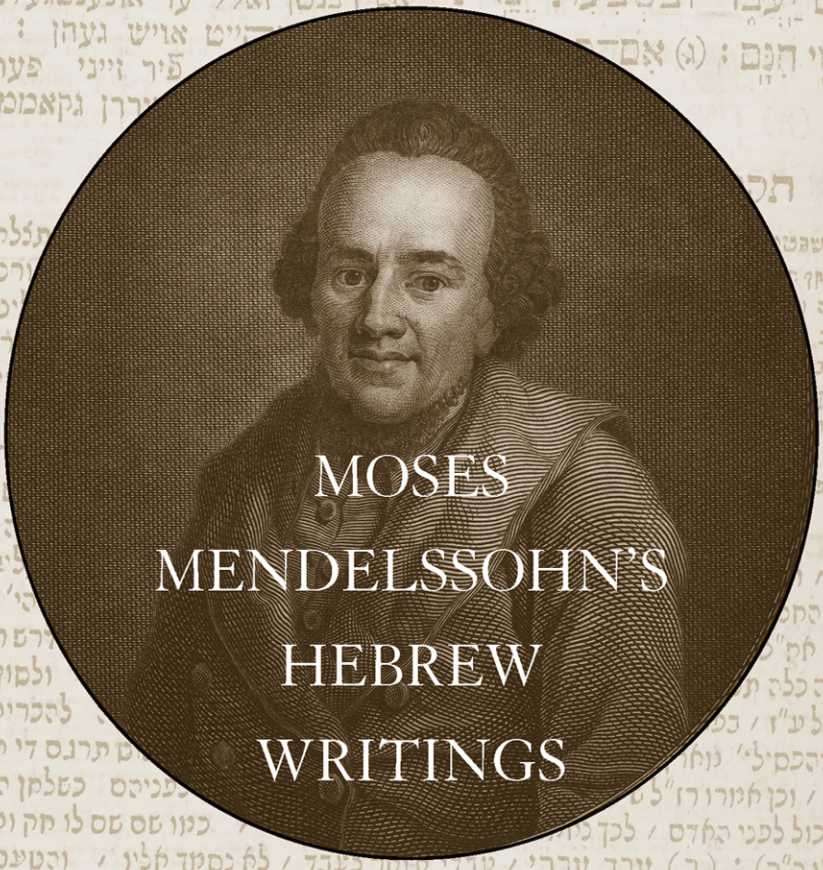

MOSES MENDELSSOHN'S HEBREW WRITINGS

Translated by

EDWARD BREUER

Introduced and Annotated by

EDWARD BREUER and DAVID SORKIN

YALE JUDAICA SERIES

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CONTENTS

TRANSLATOR'S ACKNOWLEDGMENTS ix

GENERAL NOTES TO THE TRANSLATION xi

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS xiii

INTRODUCTION: THE MENDELSSOHN MYTH AND THE ASYMMETRICAL RECEPTION OF THE HEBREW WRITINGS 1

I. *QOHELET MUSAR* / PREACHER OF MORALS 21

EDITORS' INTRODUCTION 23

SELECTIONS 28

II. *BE'UR MILLOT HA-HIGGAYON* / COMMENTARY ON THE TREATISE ON LOGICAL TERMS 51

EDITORS' INTRODUCTION 53

SELECTIONS 66

III. *MEGILLAT QOHELET* / COMMENTARY ON ECCLESIASTES 107

EDITORS' INTRODUCTION 109

SELECTIONS 123

IV. *SEFER NETIVOT HA-SHALOM* / THE PATHS OF PEACE 219

EDITORS' INTRODUCTION 221

OR LI-NETIVAH / A LIGHT FOR THE PATH: A GENERAL INTRODUCTION TO ALL FIVE BOOKS [OF THE PENTATEUCH] 241

SELECTIONS FROM GENESIS 303

SELECTIONS FROM EXODUS 325

SELECTIONS FROM LEVITICUS, NUMBERS, AND DEUTERONOMY 471

ADDITIONAL BIBLIOGRAPHY 493

GLOSSARY 497

GENERAL INDEX 503

INDEX OF SOURCES 521

TRANSLATOR'S ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

When David Sorkin first broached the idea for this volume in a ride to Ben Gurion airport in the dead of night, neither of us imagined that the manuscript would only receive its final touches in New Haven over fifteen years later. The work was by turns stimulating, difficult, and arduous, but we never wavered from the task. This has been a rewarding endeavor at every turn.

The combination of Moses Mendelssohn's wide-ranging interests and deep scholarship made this a particularly challenging project. Written over the span of almost thirty years, these Hebrew writings ranged from belle-lettristic prose to a primer on logic to biblical commentaries, and included close textual readings and essays ranging from the history of scriptural translations to the nature of revelation. Along the way, Mendelssohn delved into many areas of Jewish learning: biblical grammar and poetics, midrash halakhah and aggadah, post-rabbinic biblical exegesis, and medieval Jewish philosophy and Kabbalah.

Given the range of Mendelssohn's Hebrew writings, this volume of translations would not have been possible without the assistance of numerous scholars on two continents, and it is with deep gratitude that I acknowledge the many debts incurred. I was privileged to have had the wisdom and knowledge that these individuals offered with such generosity of spirit, and I am blessed by the fact that many of them are also dear friends.

Years after leaving graduate school, Bernard Septimus continued to answer my queries regarding medieval terminology and to provide context for philosophical notions and ideas. His erudition and uncompromising excellence remain a model and an inspiration for this volume. Uri Melammed was an invaluable resource and patient guide to all matters of Hebrew grammar, including pre-modern terminology and some rather arcane points that he explained with impressive clarity.

A number of native German speakers, fine scholars all, allowed me to consult with them at different stages of the project regarding Mendelssohn's Pentateuch

and Psalms translations: my thanks to Katja Vehlow, David Bollag, and Shimon Gesundheit. Gideon Freudenthal was exceptionally generous with his time and energy in this regard, bringing not only a knowledge of eighteenth-century German and German philosophy but also deep insight into Mendelssohn as a thinker and exegete. He was, in addition, instrumental in making sense of some difficult Hebrew passages. I am particularly grateful for his encouragement and support.

Along the way, I posed questions large and small to many individuals, from good friends and scholars I encountered daily in the National Library of Israel to those I had never met but who nevertheless responded helpfully to the queries of a complete stranger. I wish to thank Tova Beeri, Adele Berlin, Harm den Boer, Marc Brettler, Mark Clarfield, Levi Cooper, Shmuel Feiner, Ariel Furstenberg, Isaac Gottlieb, Bernard Grossfeld z"l, Joel Hecker, Cordelia Hoestermann, Seth Jerchower, Hans Lausch, David Malkiel, Aharon Maman, Paul Mandel, Martin McNamara, Steven Nadler, Jordan Penkower, James Robinson, Shlomo Sela, Michael Sokoloff, Josef Stern, Adena Tanenbaum, Ittai Joseph Tamari, Ofra Tirosh-Becker, Thomas Tobin, Meir Triebitz, David Weiss-Halivni, Anthony E. Williams-Jones, and Joseph Yahalom.

As the various sections of this volume went through successive drafts, numerous friends and colleagues gave generously of their time to review the translations and offer substantive comment, guidance, and advice. My sincere thanks to Lawrence Kaplan, Martin Lockshin, Eric Lawee, and David Stern. The final manuscript was reviewed for the Yale Judaica Publication Committee by Warren Zev Harvey; his innumerable corrections and suggested revisions improved the volume in significant ways. Charles Manekin and Michah Gottlieb were readers for Yale University Press, and they too caught errors and prodded us to further improve upon the manuscript. Finally, David and I both want to thank Ivan Marcus for his helpful suggestions and for shepherding the manuscript through its final stages.

The editors gratefully acknowledge permission to reprint "Moses Mendelssohn's First Hebrew Publication: An Annotated Translation of the Kohelet Musar," *Leo Baeck Institute Yearbook* 48 (2003) 3–23.

GENERAL NOTES TO THE TRANSLATION

The four parts of this volume represent three different genres, each with its own style and character. The translations try to preserve the distinctiveness of each genre while also reflecting the remarkable consistency of Mendelssohn's thought throughout his oeuvre.

One difficulty in translating Mendelssohn's Hebrew writings is the abundance of citations from earlier Hebrew texts and the many allusive references easily recognized by his learned contemporaries. There is hardly a page of this volume that does not cite or allude to biblical, rabbinic, and medieval literature. These textual strata are often intertwined, as when Mendelssohn cited a medieval author who explicated a rabbinic passage that made use of a scriptural prooftext. While I regularly and carefully consulted standard English translations of the relevant Hebrew classics, there were compelling reasons to translate such citations afresh in accord with Mendelssohn's handling. Mendelssohn wrote in a fluid style and incorporated his citations and allusions in an equally seamless fashion, and the translation has tried to achieve some of the same effect. More important, in presenting these citations and allusions, I have tried to do justice to Mendelssohn's argument or line of reasoning. In many instances this meant conveying the points of emphasis or ambiguities that caught Mendelssohn's eye and spurred his interpretation, that is, some sense of Mendelssohn's *perception* of the passage apart from his subsequent *interpretation* of its words or meaning. Elsewhere, the context necessitated a different approach, namely, underscoring something of the creativity or novelty of Mendelssohn's reading by making somewhat clearer the gap or distance between his interpretation and the plain (or traditional) sense of the text. There was, finally, a natural concern for consistency and readability as one moves between Mendelssohn's words and his citations, and between some of the same citations in different contexts.

The only English translation used consistently throughout was Moses Maimonides, *The Guide of the Perplexed*, trans. Shlomo Pines (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1963).

Following the style of the Yale Judaica Series, biblical citations have been indicated in parentheses. In order to distinguish these editorial insertions from Mendelssohn's own parenthetical references or comments, the latter have been marked as °() throughout.

Further notes on the translations appear in each of the four parts of this volume at the end of the Editors' Introduction.

ABBREVIATIONS

PRIMARY SOURCES

Books of the Bible

1 Chron.	1 Chronicles	Jer.	Jeremiah
2 Chron.	2 Chronicles	Jon.	Jonah
1 Kgs.	1 Kings	Josh.	Joshua
2 Kgs.	2 Kings	Judg.	Judges
1 Sam.	1 Samuel	Lam.	Lamentations
2 Sam.	2 Samuel	Lev.	Leviticus
Dan.	Daniel	Mal.	Malachi
Deut.	Deuteronomy	Mic.	Micah
Ecc.	Ecclesiastes	Nah.	Nahum
Ex.	Exodus	Neh.	Nehemiah
Ez.	Ezekiel	Num.	Numbers
Esth.	Esther	Obad.	Obadiah
Gen.	Genesis	Prov.	Proverbs
Hab.	Habakkuk	Ps.	Psalms
Hag.	Haggai	Song	Song of Songs
Hos.	Hosea	Zech.	Zechariah
Isa.	Isaiah	Zeph.	Zephaniah

Rabbinic Tractates

Unless otherwise noted, all references are to the Babylonian Talmud. References to other rabbinic works organized by Tractate are as follows: Mishnah (M.), Tosefta (T.), Palestinian Talmud (P.)

Arak.	ʿArakhin	B.B.	Bava Batra
A.Z.	ʿAvodah Zarah	Bekh.	Bekhorot

Ber.	Berakhot
Bikk.	Bikkurim
B.M.	Bava Meṣiʿa
B.Q.	Bava Qamma
Dem.	Demaʾi
Edu.	ʿEduyyot
Eruv.	ʿEruvin
Giṭṭ.	Giṭṭin
Ḥag.	Ḥagigah
Ḥull.	Ḥullin
Hor.	Horayot
Kel.	Kelim
Ket.	Ketubot
Maas.	Maʿaserot
Makk.	Makkot
Meg.	Megillah
Men.	Menaḥot
Midd.	Middot
Miq.	Miqvaʾot
M.Q.	Moʿed Qaṭan
Ned.	Nedarim
Nidd.	Niddah
Pes.	Pesaḥim
Qidd.	Qiddushin
R.H.	Rosh ha-Shanah
San.	Sanhedrin
Shab.	Shabbat
Shev.	Shevuʿot
Sheq.	Sheqalim
Sof.	Soferim
Sot.	Soṭah
Sukk.	Sukkah
Taan.	Taʿanit
Tem.	Temurah
Ter	Terumot
Yad.	Yadayim
Yev.	Yevamot
Yom.	Yoma
Zev.	Zevaḥim

Other Rabbinic Writings

A.R.	Avot de-Rabbi Natan
Ecc. R.	Ecclesiastes Rabbah
Gen. R.	Genesis Rabbah
Deut. R.	Deuteronomy Rabbah
Exod. R.	Exodus Rabbah
Lev. R.	Leviticus Rabbah
Mekh.	Mekhilta de-Rabbi Yishmaʿel
Num. R.	Numbers Rabbah
PRE	Pirqe de-Rabbi Eliezer
Song. R.	Song of Songs Rabbah
Tan.	Tanḥuma
Yal. Sh.	Yalqut Shimʿoni

Mendelssohn's Writings

Arkush, *Jerusalem*	Allan Arkush trans., *Moses Mendelssohn, Jerusalem or on Religious Power and Judaism*. Hanover and London: Brandeis University Press, 1983.

GS	Moses Mendelssohn *Gesammelte Schriften*. 7 vols. Leipzig: Brockhaus, 1843–45.
JubA	*Gesammelte Schriften. Jubiläumsausgabe*. 27 vols. in 36. Stuttgart: Frommann-Holzboog, 1972–.
PW	*Moses Mendelssohn: Philosophical Writings*, ed. Daniel Dahlstrom. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997.

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Breuer, *Limits*	Edward Breuer, *The Limits of Enlightenment: Jews, Germans and the Eighteenth-Century Study of Scripture*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard Center for Jewish Studies, 1996.
Euchel, *Toledot*	Isaac Euchel, *Toledot Rabbenu he-Ḥakham Mosheh ben Menahem*. Berlin: Ḥinukh Neʿarim, 1788.
Freudenthal, *Religion*	Gideon Freudenthal, *No Religion Without Idolatry: Mendelssohn's Jewish Enlightenment*. Notre Dame, IN: Notre Dame University Press, 2012.
Gilon, *Qohelet Musar*	Meir Gilon, *Qohelet Musar le-Mendelson ʿal Reqaʿ Tequfato*. Jerusalem: Israel Academy of Sciences and Humanities, 1979.
Hildesheimer, *Mendelssohn*	Meir Hildesheimer, "Moses Mendelssohn in Nineteenth-Century Rabbinical Literature." *Proceedings of the American Academy for Jewish Research* 55 (1988) 79–133.
Kayserling, *Mendelssohn*	Meyer Kayserling, *Moses Mendelssohn: Sein Leben und seine Werke*. Leipzig: Hermann Mendelssohn, 1862.
LBIYB	Leo Baeck Institute Year Book
Levenson, *Mendelssohn*	Edward R. Levenson, *Moses Mendelssohn's Understanding of Logico-Grammatical and Literary Construction*, Ph.D. diss., Brandeis University, 1972.

Lowenstein, *Readership*	Steven Lowenstein, "The Readership of Mendelssohn's Bible Translation," in Lowenstein, ed., *The Mechanics of Change: Essays in the Social History of German Jewry*. Atlanta, GA: Scholars Press, 1992, 29–64.
PAAJR	Proceedings of the American Academy for Jewish Research
Sandler, *Beʾur*	Peretz Sandler, *Ha-Beʾur la-Torah shel Mosheh Mendelson ve-Siʿato*. Jerusalem: R. Mass, 1940.
Sorkin, *Mendelssohn*	David Sorkin, *Moses Mendelssohn and the Religious Enlightenment*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996.
Weinberg, *Einleitung*	Werner Weinberg, "Einleitung zu den Bänden 15–18." *JubA* 15,1:ix–cliv.
Wolff, *Vernünftige*	Christian Wolff, *Vernünftige Gedancken von Gott, der Welt und der Seele des Menschen*. Leipzig: [n.p.], 1729.

INTRODUCTION

The Mendelssohn Myth and the Asymmetrical Reception of the Hebrew Writings

This volume makes available for the first time in English generous selections from the entire corpus of Moses Mendelssohn's published Hebrew writings. It aims to enable an English-speaking audience to encounter the full range of Mendelssohn's oeuvre: not just the standard German works, many of which have been translated into English, but the Hebrew works that, inaccessible except to scholars versed in the Hebrew textual tradition, have only recently begun to find their place in the understanding of Mendelssohn's thought. After decades of studying and teaching Mendelssohn's writings, the editors of this volume are convinced that his life and thought cannot be fully comprehended without taking account of his Hebrew works. Scholars who ignore them run the risk of distorting his biography and oeuvre.

Mendelssohn wrote in Hebrew throughout his lifetime. Over three decades of prolific writing and publishing, he devoted far more time and sustained labor to his new edition of the Pentateuch, replete with translation, commentary, and multiple introductions, than to any other project. These Hebrew writings attest to Mendelssohn's abiding immersion in the Hebrew textual tradition—biblical, rabbinic, and medieval. It was this deep commitment that motivated Mendelssohn to try to revive the traditions of philosophy and biblical exegesis in Hebrew.

The Hebrew texts selected for this volume are representative of Mendelssohn's thinking on Jewish and general topics and, not coincidentally, also resonate with his German writings. The Hebrew works speak to such particularist Jewish subjects as God's historically mediated relationship with the Jewish people, the names of God, the nature of biblical poetry, and the meaning of the commandments. At the same time these writings speak to a range of general topics: mankind's perfectibility and need for sociability, the immortality of the soul and the universality of eternal beliefs, and the nature of political authority.

Almost all of Mendelssohn's Hebrew texts were written as commentaries, one of the most difficult genres of literature, yet one at the heart of the Jewish

textual tradition. His three most important Hebrew books are straightforward commentaries on Maimonides' philosophical primer, the Book of Ecclesiastes, and the Pentateuch. Even his first Hebrew composition, a short-lived moralistic journal that is not strictly speaking a commentary, draws upon and comments continuously on a variety of biblical, rabbinic, and medieval texts. Indeed, Mendelssohn's very language in that early work, consisting of a pastiche of quotations from earlier literature, is itself a form of commentary. While the genre of commentary is inherently abstruse and often opaque, Mendelssohn worked hard to offer a model of graceful lucidity. The introductions and annotations offered in this volume try to make these commentaries as transparent as possible.

Mendelssohn's introductions to his three commentaries are important essays in their own right; they display his concerns and reveal much of his originality. In the introduction to Maimonides' treatise on logical terms he discusses the relationship of language and thought. The introduction to the commentary on Ecclesiastes explores the notion of linguistic polysemy and then uses it to defend traditions of rabbinic and medieval Jewish interpretation. His lengthy introductions to the Pentateuch address questions regarding the textual integrity of Scripture and the historical nature of translations. Mendelssohn's commentary on the Song of the Sea (Exodus 15) also opens with a long disquisition on the nature of Hebrew poetry, and he begins his commentary on the Decalogue with an essay on revelation and belief. And interspersed in that commentary itself are brief discussions on a wide range of subjects, including human sexuality and desire, the nature of language and writing (in ancient Egypt and pre-colonial Peru, no less), and the role of luxury in the development of society.

Students of Mendelssohn's writings, from those encountering him for the first time to those who have seriously grappled with his thought, will find this volume useful in discovering the "Hebrew" Mendelssohn. The Mendelssohn evident in these selections, as we will discuss below, may be disconcertingly different from the one conventionally depicted on the basis of the German writings, yet these texts are integral and indispensable to a full understanding of this formative figure of modern Judaism.

BRIEF BIOGRAPHY

Moses Mendelssohn (1729–1786) was the emblematic Jew of the Enlightenment. He was the "Socrates of Berlin," a leading figure of the Berlin *Aufklärung*, and a Berlin landmark who attracted visiting men of letters, whether aspiring or established. He was also "Moses of Dessau" (*Mosheh mi-Dessau*; his Hebrew pen name), renowned as the preeminent thinker of the *Haskalah* who was honored with the phrase "from Moses [Maimonides] unto Moses [Mendelssohn] there was none like Moses," and the magnet for Jewish intellectuals from across Europe.

Born to an impecunious family of distinguished lineage, Mendelssohn acquired an outstanding Jewish education in Dessau and Berlin. In his Hebrew writings, which spanned the different stages of his career, he sought to expand the Ashkenazic curriculum that concentrated almost exclusively on Talmud and rabbinic codes, and for metaphysical speculation, on Kabbalistic literature. He aimed to do this by reviving the study of biblical exegesis and philosophy, insisting that the latter also be in Hebrew. To this end he created the first modern journal in Hebrew, *Qohelet Musar* (*The Preacher of Morals*), in the late 1750s; updated Maimonides' twelfth-century primer on logic with an introduction and commentary in *Be'ur Millot ha-Higgayon* (*Commentary on the Treatise on Logical Terms*) in 1761 and 1765; and wrote an introduction and commentary on Ecclesiastes titled *Megillat Qohelet* in 1770. His magnum opus was the five-volume *Sefer Netivot ha-Shalom* (*The Book of the Paths of Peace*) published between 1780 and 1783 and commonly referred to by the generic word that he assigned to the commentary, the *Be'ur*.[1] This was an ambitious new edition of the Pentateuch that included his translation of the Torah into High German, a lengthy and learned three-part general introduction, a multi-author Hebrew commentary, and a set of technical notes to the masoretic text.

With the help of friends and tutors, yet largely as an autodidact, he succeeded in gaining a secular education as well. Mendelssohn contributed to multiple fields of the Enlightenment. In metaphysics he won first prize in an essay competition of the Berlin Royal Academy of Sciences (Kant won second prize); in aesthetics he introduced ideas that were seminal for other thinkers, including Lessing and Kant; and in moral philosophy, by updating one of Plato's dialogues, he wrote a European bestseller on the immortality of the soul (*Phädon*, 1767).

Toward the end of his life he reluctantly engaged in two notable public controversies. Although Mendelssohn served as an intercessor on behalf of Jewish communities in distress throughout the 1770s, it was only in the following decade that he began to advocate for an improvement in the Jews' civic status by promoting toleration and calling for an end to legal discrimination. In response to Mendelssohn's pronouncement against all forms of religious coercion, including excommunication, an anonymous writer challenged his continued fidelity to Judaism. Mendelssohn answered by composing a polemical defense of his views of church-state relations and of Judaism, *Jerusalem, or On Religious Power and Judaism* (1783), which gained fame as his credo. In 1784 a bitter polemic developed over whether Gotthold Ephraim Lessing (1729–1781),

1. Even though the name of Mendelssohn's commentary is colloquially referred to as the *Bi'ur*, the proper grammatical form is *Be'ur*. In technical terms: the noun is formed from an intensive stem, like the word *limmud*, which has a doubling of the second consonant; in our case, since the guttural *aleph* cannot be doubled, the initial *ḥiriq* undergoes a compensatory lengthening and is elongated with a *ṣere*. Other examples of this in post-biblical Hebrew are *ye'ush* (despair) and *te'ur* (description).

who was Mendelssohn's closest friend and collaborator and whose friendship symbolized the utopia of Jewish-Christian interaction, had become an adherent of pantheism and Spinozism toward the end of his life. Mendelssohn wrote his final book, *The Morning Hours* (1785), to defend the existence of God and his and his friend's understanding of Spinoza.

THE ASYMMETRICAL RECEPTION OF THE HEBREW WORKS

Moses Mendelssohn's Hebrew writings have had a strikingly asymmetrical history. On the one side, his oeuvre and legacy have been locked into a myth of Germanification. For a century and a half, scholars have unfailingly privileged his German works. They consistently presented him as a German thinker who, as a prominent figure of the Berlin *Aufklärung* and the preeminent Jewish intellectual, wrote in German. Scholars have always acknowledged that he also wrote in Hebrew, yet have almost uniformly ignored or marginalized those works by failing to take account of their contents. This practice has been flagrant, albeit excusable, among scholars who wrote about Mendelssohn the *Aufklärer*, since they assumed that knowledge of his Hebrew works was irrelevant. It has been egregious and unjustifiable among those who wrote about him as a Jewish thinker or who aimed to give a comprehensive interpretation of his thought. Worse still, many scholars who were competent if not highly qualified Hebraists acquiesced to the Germanifying myth, relegating the Hebrew works to the margins by failing to analyze their contents in a serious and sustained manner.

On the other side, in the century after Mendelssohn's death his Hebrew works enjoyed widespread dissemination: they were among the most widely distributed Hebrew books in Europe. His early works on logic and biblical exegesis served as introductions to the Jewish Enlightenment (*Haskalah*) and contemporary modes of thought for Hebrew readers, especially in Eastern Europe. His translation of and commentary on the Pentateuch became *the* study Bible in many schools, homes, and Jewish communities across Europe. Yet the myth of Germanification has successfully obscured this history.

The marginalization of the Hebrew works began with the obituaries that appeared after Mendelssohn's death and the biographical accounts that appeared in the next few years in lexicons and at various anniversaries. The obituaries, some rather brief, at best only mentioned his translations of the Psalms and the Pentateuch.[2] In his 1787 account, Mirabeau, who relied on the reports of others, did not even mention the Bible translation.[3]

2. Michael Albrecht has collected many of these in volume 23 of the collected works. *JubA*, 23:10–74 (*Dokumente II*). The obituaries include Nicolai, Biester, Höchheimer, Moritz, Conz, Knüpplen/Nencke/Paalzow, and Schütz.

3. *JubA*, 23:75–100.

The real creators of the Germanifying myth were the biographers Isaac Euchel (1788) and Daniel Jenisch (1789). They provided lengthy summaries and analyses of Mendelssohn's German works, yet only listed some of the Hebrew works with at best minimal discussions of their contents. Their accounts were to serve virtually all future writers and scholars as prime sources for Mendelssohn's life. Euchel, writing in Hebrew, mentioned the *Qohelet Musar* and its alleged suppression by the rabbis; noted Mendelssohn's endorsement of studying logic and philosophy in the introduction to Maimonides' primer; devoted one sentence to the commentary on Ecclesiastes; and briefly discussed the Pentateuch translation.[4] Jenisch, who called Mendelssohn the "Luther of the Jews," repeated Euchel's description of the *Qohelet Musar* and its suppression as well as his mere mention of the Ecclesiastes commentary. Jenisch noted the Pentateuch and Psalms translations, devoting two paragraphs to the latter.[5] The template Euchel and Jenisch established was to record the existence of some of the Hebrew works without engaging their contents.[6]

The 1843–45 edition of Mendelssohn's works and Meyer Kayserling's biographical study of 1862 inaugurated the scholarly study of Mendelssohn. Together, they canonized Mendelssohn's German writings and furthered the marginalization of the Hebrew works.[7]

THE COLLECTED WORKS, 1843–1845

The seven volumes published between 1843 and 1845, which for some eighty years stood as the best and most inclusive edition, were devoted exclusively to the German works.[8] The edition was a Mendelssohn family affair, and the family, distant from Judaism, was eager to emphasize the German character of Mendelssohn's oeuvre. The publisher Brockhaus first broached the idea of an edition to Mendelssohn's grandson, the composer Felix Mendelssohn-Bartholdy (1809–47), who was raised as a Christian. Felix approached his uncle Joseph

4. Euchel, *Toledot*; on *Qohelet Musar* see p. 13; for the commentary on Ecclesiastes, p. 26; for the Pentateuch translation, pp. 27–28.

5. *JubA*, 23:266, 274, 282.

6. This pattern can be seen in H. Somerhausen (1811), *JubA*, 23:336–64, as well as in David Friedländer's various accounts, *JubA*, 23:372–408, 410–22.

7. An important and much cited early study of Mendelssohn was Daniel Jenisch, "Skizze von dem Leben und Charakter Mendelssohns," in Johann Georg Muechler, ed., *Moses Mendelssohns kleine philosophische Schriften* (Berlin: Friedrich Vieweg, 1789). A good selection of early biographical works is to be found in Alexander Altmann, "'Moses Mendelssohn's Gesammelte Schriften': Neuerschlossene Briefe Zur Geschichte ihrer Herausgabe," *Bulletin des Leo Baeck Instituts* 11 no. 42 (1968): 93–95. See also Herrmann M.Z. Meyer, *Moses Mendelssohn Bibliographie* (Berlin: De Gruyter, 1965); and Michael Albrecht, "Moses Mendelssohn: Ein Forschungsbericht, 1965–1980," *Deutsche Vierteljahresschrift für Literaturwissenschaft und Geistesgeschichte* 57 (1983): 64–166.

8. Dr. G.B. Mendelssohn, ed., *GS*.

(1770–1848), Mendelssohn's son and the founder of the banking house, who responded enthusiastically. Joseph, who had remained Jewish out of family pride but whose attachment was nominal and his knowledge minimal, suggested including Mendelssohn's journal articles and reviews and oversaw production.[9] The editor of the edition, who had been born Benjamin but taken the name Georg at his conversion in 1821, was a conservative Prussian patriot.[10]

Joseph wrote the biography that appeared in the first volume: he projected his pronounced ambivalence toward things Jewish onto his father, inspiring striking misconceptions that have circulated widely ever since.[11] Joseph saw his father as a second Moses dedicated to redeeming his fellow Jews from bondage. This Moses' promised land, which he, like the first Moses, was not allowed to enter, was an "amelioration of the [Jews'] spiritual and civic condition."[12]

Joseph, furthermore, reduced his father's relationship to Judaism to a reformatory project. He argued that Mendelssohn calculatingly continued to observe Jewish law since otherwise he could not influence his fellow Jews.[13] Joseph regarded his father's Judaism as a vestige maintained solely for the sake of reformation, and he concomitantly viewed Judaism as playing little role in either his father's self-understanding or his self-presentation. Indeed, Joseph advanced the mistaken notion, widely accepted ever since, that his father translated the Pentateuch in order to teach Jews German.[14]

The exclusion of Mendelssohn's Hebrew works is similarly visible in the scholarly introduction written by Christian August Brandis (1790–1867), a Professor of Philosophy and colleague of Georg Benjamin's at the University of

9. Joseph was more interested in art and literature, especially Italian literature. He published a book defending Rosetti's interpretation of Dante (*Bericht über Rosetti's Ideen zu einer neuen Erläuterung des Dante und der Dichter seiner Zeit*, 1840). He had also succeeded in turning the bank he founded into the second largest private bank in Berlin and himself into a wealthy man. See W. Treue, "Das Bankhaus Mendelssohn als Beispiel einer Privatbank im 19. und 20. Jahrhundert," *Mendelssohn-Studien* 1 (1972): 29–80.

10. For Georg Benjamin's editorship see Altmann, "Moses Mendelssohn's Gesammelte Schriften," 73–75. On Georg Benjamin see *Neue Deutsche Biographie* (Berlin: Dunker & Humblot, 1953–), 17:50–52; and Felix Gilbert, "G.B. Mendelssohn und Karl Mendelssohn Bartholdy, zwei Professoren aus des 19. Jahrhunderts," *Mendelssohn-Studien* 2 (1975): 183–93.

11. "Moses Mendelssohn's Lebensgeschichte," *GS*, 1:3–56. For Joseph's authorship see Altmann, "Moses Mendelssohn's Gesammelte Schriften," 83–99.

12. *GS*, 1:46–47. The German phrase is, "Verbesserung des geistigen und bürgerlichen Zustandes." On Joseph's desire to make known what he thought were his father's hitherto unknown reformatory efforts see his correspondence quoted in Altmann, "Moses Mendelssohn's Gesammelte Schriften," 108.

13. *GS*, 1:43.

14. *GS*, 1:25–27. Shortly after the Pentateuch appeared, Rabbi Ezekiel Landau, the Chief Rabbi of Prague, allegedly complained that teachers were expending too much time explaining the high level of German employed in the translation. This might well have been true in Bohemia, at least, but Landau never claimed that the translation aimed to teach Jews German.

Bonn.[15] Brandis limited his essay to Mendelssohn's major German philosophical works; he did not treat the minor works or any of the works dealing with Judaism.[16]

The closest one gets to the Hebrew works is the "Introduction to Mendelssohn's Translation of the Five Books of Moses," which was an afterthought.[17] Georg Benjamin had not originally intended to include the Pentateuch translation in the edition. Once a family associate had succeeded in convincing him otherwise, volume four was divided into two parts so that the edition would not exceed the advertised seven-volume format.[18] The family recruited a qualified Hebrew scholar, Heymann Jolowicz (1816–75), to write the introduction and prepare the translation for publication.[19]

Jolowicz quoted lengthy passages from Mendelssohn's introduction to give an account of the translation, drawing also on the sample translation and prospectus for the project (*'Alim li-Terufah*).[20] In addition, he reproduced the title pages of a number of the volumes of the original as well as of later editions, including the Hebrew, for which he provided an interlinear translation, and he made it clear to readers that the work was based on Jewish sources and was aimed at a Jewish audience. Nonetheless, the edition worked to efface the fact that the translation was originally an integral part of a Hebrew Bible. Printed in Latin rather than Hebrew letters, the translation stood on its own: it was wrenched out of its original Hebrew setting by appearing without the accompanying Hebrew texts—the Bible, the commentary, and the notes on the masoretic text. The edition effectively transformed the translation into a stand-alone German Bible.

The 1843–45 *Gesammelte Schriften* thus embodied the myth of a German Mendelssohn. His Hebrew works were excluded; the Pentateuch translation was transformed into a German work; and the biography made his Judaism a mere instrument of his reformatory endeavors.

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15. "Zur Einleitung in Moses Mendelssohn's philosophische Schriften," *GS*, 1:57–100. Brandis specialized in ancient philosophy. See *Allgemeine Deutsche Biographie* 56 vols. (Berlin, 1876), 3:245. He was one of two colleagues to support Georg Benjamin's promotion to ("ordentlicher") Professor. See Gilbert, "G.B. Mendelssohn und Karl Mendelssohn Bartholdy," 191.

16. Brandis discussed Mendelssohn's works according to subjects. He treated the early metaphysical works (*Philosophische Gespräche*; *Über die Evidenz in metaphysischen Wissenschaften*); the aesthetic works (*Brief über die Empfindungen*; "Hauptgrundsätze der schönen Künste und Wissenschaften"); the *Phädon*; and the *Morgenstunden*. He did not deal with any of the minor works. For his disclaimer about the minor works and those with Jewish content see *GS*, 1:100.

17. "Einleitung in Moses Mendelssohn's Übersetzung der fünf Bücher Mose," *GS*, 7:xvii–lv.

18. *GS*, 7:103.

19. *GS*, 7:xvii–lv. For Jolowicz's role in the edition see Altmann, "Moses Mendelssohn's Gesammelte Schriften," 82. Jolowicz subsequently published a translation of the entire *Or li-Netivah* under independent auspices. See *Moses Mendelssohn's allgemeine Einleitung in die fünf Buecher Moses. Deutsch von Dr. H. Jolowicz* (Cöslin: C.G. Hendess, 1847).

20. *GS*, 7:xxii–xxvii.

THE FIRST SCHOLARLY BIOGRAPHY

Meyer Kayserling reinforced the myth in his biography of 1862.[21] Unlike Joseph Mendelssohn and Brandis, who had demoted Mendelssohn to the status of a second-tier epigone, Kayserling accorded Mendelssohn a distinguished place in the pantheon of eighteenth-century philosophy, deeming him a major figure who joined in "common activity" with two other kindred spirits (all born in 1729), Lessing and Reimarus.[22] Kayserling also proclaimed the sincerity of Mendelssohn's religious convictions: "he was rooted with every fiber of his inner self in his belief and lived strictly according to Talmudic precepts."[23] Kayserling emphasized that Mendelssohn's Hebrew works, especially his introductions to Ecclesiastes and the Pentateuch, were strictly orthodox and had received accolades from contemporary rabbis.[24]

Yet beyond this, the difference between Kayserling and Joseph Mendelssohn receded entirely from view. Kayserling joined Joseph in seeing Mendelssohn as a "reformer" who aimed to introduce the Jews to German culture and *Bildung*.[25] While acknowledging the orthodox nature of the Hebrew works, Kayserling understood them first and foremost as designed to promote the Jews' *Bildung*. For Kayserling, Mendelssohn's intention in translating the Pentateuch was "to foster jointly Judaism and German education (*deutsche Bildung*)."[26] He assessed the impact of Mendelssohn's translations of Psalms and the Pentateuch in the same terms.

> Mendelssohn's translations of the Pentateuch and Psalms were epoch-making for the cultural history of his people and exercised the most potent and lasting influence on the entire cultural development of his co-religionists. The [translation] became the educator of the German Jews not just for the comprehension of scripture itself but also principally for the German language; the [translation] was the teacher of Jewish youth and rendered them receptive to German culture and German nationality (*deutsche Bildung und deutsche Nationalität*).[27]

While Kayserling acknowledged Mendelssohn's Hebrew works and certified their orthodoxy, he said nothing of their contents. This marginalization

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21. Kayserling, *Mendelssohn*.

22. For his relationship to Lessing and Reimarus see ibid., 2; for his relationship to Wolff see ibid., 392.

23. Ibid., 143.

24. Ibid., 323, 386.

25. Ibid., 387. For other striking passages see 325 & 385. He points to the lack of rights in some states on 325. The phrase "ignorance and cynical filth" is taken verbatim from Joseph Mendelssohn's biography of his father. See *GS*, 1:44. For the genesis and development of the ideology of emancipation see David Sorkin, *The Transformation of German Jewry, 1780–1840* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1987).

26. Kayserling, *Mendelssohn*, 142 & 284. Kayserling mentioned the medieval commentators on whom Mendelssohn relied. Ibid., 323.

27. Ibid., 321–22.

finds indelible expression in his concluding characterization of Mendelssohn as "a sincere religious Jew and a German writer" who was "a noble model for posterity."[28] Kayserling did not recognize Mendelssohn as a Hebrew writer.

EDITIONS AND READERS OF THE HEBREW WRITINGS

At the same time that scholars were marginalizing the Hebrew writings, the works themselves were enjoying widespread publication and dissemination, reaching ever wider audiences and exerting a lasting impact. The *Be'ur Millot ha-Higgayon* was republished three times in Mendelssohn's lifetime, nine times in the nineteenth century, and a handful of times in the twentieth century. Mendelssohn's edition has come to serve as *the* study text for Maimonides' work even for the most orthodox of scholars, to the degree that they interest themselves in the subjects of logic and philosophy. Mendelssohn's commentary on Ecclesiastes was published at least twenty-four times from 1800 to 1860, with a good number of these reprints appearing in editions of Mendelssohn's Pentateuch or expanded maskilic editions of Scripture. The Lithuanian maskil Mordechai Aaron Günzberg (1795–1846) credited this commentary with persuading him of the necessity of a Haskalah in which intellect would be subordinate to faith.[29] The Galician scholar Nahman Krochmal used the work as a point of reference in his own scholarship.[30] The work found admirers among German Orthodox rabbis: for example, the Chief Rabbi of Königsberg Jacob Zvi Meklenburg drew on the exegetical approach laid out in the introduction to *Megillat Qohelet* and, more generally, placed Mendelssohn on a cultural continuum alongside Elijah the Gaon of Vilna.[31]

Sefer Netivot ha-Shalom had the publishing history of a classic text. The first edition of the Bible translation had 515 subscribers, from London in the west to Vilna in the east, and from Trieste in the south to Hamburg in the north. A distinct majority were drawn from the élites of the relatively new urban settlements across north central Europe, e.g., Berlin, Copenhagen, Königsberg, and Vienna. These settlements, founded by Court Jews and their relatives since the Thirty Years' War, were in fact the loci of the Central European Haskalah. Berlin had 122 subscribers (over 20 percent of all subscribers), who purchased

28. Ibid., 484. The German is: "ein wahrhaft religiöser Jude und ein deutscher Schriftsteller, als ein hohes Muster der Nachwelt. . . ."

29. Israel Bartal, "Mordechai Aaron Günzburg: A Lithuanian Maskil Faces Modernity," in Frances Malino and David Sorkin, eds., *Profiles in Diversity: Jews in a Changing Europe, 1750–1870* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1998), 129–30.

30. Simon Rawidowicz, ed., *Kitve Rabi Naḥman Qrokhmal*, 2nd ed. (Waltham, MA: Ararat, 1961), 143.

31. *Ha-Ketav ve-ha-Qabbalah* (Leipzig: C.L. Fritzsche, 1839) to Deuteronomy 30:14; Edward Breuer, "Between Haskalah and Orthodoxy: The Writings of R. Jacob Zvi Meklenburg," *Hebrew Union College Annual* 66 (1995): 259–87; and Hildesheimer, *Mendelssohn*, 109.

over one-third of the total copies, among them a majority of the wealthiest male taxpayers in the city and a number of rabbinic scholars. Thus community leaders in Central Europe dominated subscriptions to the first edition.[32] The edition also included three approbations from rabbis, including Berlin's Chief Rabbi.[33]

In the first half of the nineteenth century the Pentateuch translation and commentary enjoyed enormous distribution. There were at least two dozen editions from 1790 to 1851, averaging between three and five every decade, and three additional editions by 1914.[34] Commercial publishers, clearly expecting to turn a profit, gradually transformed the work into a study Bible by adding venerable rabbinic texts such as Onqelos' Aramaic translation of late antiquity and Rashi's eleventh-century commentary. Even more tellingly, they equipped it for use in the synagogue by appending the Sabbath liturgy and the Haftorah readings. Aside from the simple and ubiquitous Pentateuchs with Rashi, Mendelssohn's *Sefer Netivot ha-Shalom* became the most popular Bible of the century.[35] From the turn of the nineteenth century, subscription lists show the work's penetration into small towns and rural areas, especially in the southern and southwestern German states, which were the strongholds of so-called orthodox Jewish life. In Moravia in the 1820s the translation and commentary, with Rashi's commentary, were studied as a textbook in the *ḥeder*.[36] At the same time, élite urban subscribers remained in evidence: two Rothschilds purchased the 1831 Berlin edition.

Some eighty rabbis lent their prestige by subscribing to various editions. The edition of 1831, for example, included Akiba Eger (1761–1837), Chief Rabbi of Posen.[37] Numerous editions came adorned with rabbinical approbations.[38] Many rabbis across Central Europe cited Mendelssohn in their own Biblical exegeses. For example, Rabbi Zvi Hirsch Kalischer (1795–1874), the dayan of Thorn (Posen) and an early Zionist thinker, used Mendelssohn's commentary in his interpretation of the Bible.[39] Rabbi Esriel Hildesheimer (1820–99), founder of the Orthodox seminary in Berlin, praised Mendelssohn's Bible translation and commentary for directing readers to the plain meaning of the text.[40] Rabbi

32. Lowenstein, *Readership*, 31–34, 45–61.

33. Altmann, *Mendelssohn*, 379–80. For a discussion of later editions see Hildesheimer, *Mendelssohn*, 89–90.

34. Weinberg, *Einleitung*, cii–cxii.

35. Sandler, *Be'ur*, 184.

36. Hildesheimer, *Mendelssohn*, 95.

37. Lowenstein, *Readership*, 36–39; and Hildesheimer, *Mendelssohn*, 102–6.

38. Hildesheimer, *Mendelssohn*, 96–102. On the approbation of R. Meklenburg and his use of the *Be'ur*, see Breuer, "Between Haskalah and Orthodoxy."

39. Hildesheimer, *Mendelssohn*, 108. See Jody Myers, *Seeking Zion: Modernity and Messianic Activism in the Writings of Tsevi Hirsch Kalischer* (Oxford: Littman Library, 2003).

40. Hildesheimer, *Mendelssohn*, 112–13. David Ellenson, *Rabbi Esriel Hildesheimer and the Creation of a Modern Jewish Orthodoxy* (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 1990).

Elijah Guttmacher of Grätz (1795–1874), a widely admired Kabbalist who supported the colonization of Palestine, cited the Bible commentary and the commentary on Ecclesiastes on numerous occasions.[41]

Holland provides an outstanding case in which Mendelssohn's translation and commentary inspired a revival of Bible study. The Chief Rabbi of Amsterdam, Samuel Berenstein (1767–1838), founded a study society (*Re'shit Ḥokhmah*) in 1813 whose members relied on Rashi's commentary and Mendelssohn's *Be'ur*. The society's success inspired the creation of similar societies in at least four other cities.[42]

Eastern Europe produced four editions of the Bible translation and commentary. The Warsaw 1836–37 edition appeared when the entrepreneurial author and publisher Moses Tanenbaum convinced a wealthy businessman by the name of Teodor Töplitz to provide a generous subvention. Tanenbaum was subsequently able to find numerous pre-subscribers, many with the help of Rabbi Zwi Hirsch Klaczko in Vilna and Naftali Davidsohn, the son of Rabbi Chaim Davidsohn, in Warsaw. The edition came equipped as a study Bible with the Haftora readings and Sabbath prayers (including David Friedländer's 1786 German translation of the prayers).[43] The Vilna 1847 edition reportedly sold 3,000 copies. L.J. Mandelstamm (1819–1889), the head of the state-sponsored schools in Russia, issued the Vilna 1852 edition for use as a school textbook, with the imprimatur of the Tsarist government, in a print run of 10,000 copies.[44] The two private elementary schools of the Haskalah that opened in Vilna in 1841 used *Sefer Netivot ha-Shalom* to teach the Bible.[45] Rabbi Hayyim of Volozhin reportedly quoted from *Sefer Netivot ha-Shalom* and approved its use at the Volozhin Yeshivah.[46]

To be sure, Mendelssohn's Bible also elicited opposition, in his lifetime and thereafter, since it served as a symbol of the changes that were beginning to affect Jewish life. Word that the irascible Rabbi Raphael Ha-Cohen of Altona threatened to issue a ban of excommunication motivated Mendelssohn and a close friend, the Danish civil servant August Hennings, to intercede to have the King of Denmark take out a subscription. With the King a subscriber, Ha-Cohen could hardly approach the Danish authorities for the prior permission he needed to issue a ban.[47] Rabbis Moses Sofer, the Hatam Sofer (1763–1839), supposedly

41. Hildesheimer, *Mendelssohn*, 116.

42. Ibid., 131–32.

43. Majer Balaban, "Polnische Übersetzungen und Editionen der Werke Moses Mendelssohn," *Zeitschrift für die Geschichte der Juden in Deutschland* 1 (1929–30): 3, 267.

44. Lowenstein, *Readership*, 41–44.

45. Michael Stanislawski, *Tsar Nicholas I and the Jews: The Transformation of Jewish Society in Russia, 1825–1855* (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1983), 97.

46. Ibid., 78.

47. Altmann, *Mendelssohn*, 383–96; Moshe Samet, "Mendelson, Wessely ve-Rabbane Doram," in A. Gilboa, ed., *Meḥqarim be-Toledot 'Am-Yisra'el ve-Ereṣ Yisra'el* 1 (1970): 236–39; Jacob Katz, "R. Raphael Cohen, Moses Mendelssohn's Opponent," (Hebrew) *Tarbiṣ* 56 (1987): 243–64; and

uttered the (in)famous dictum in his ethical testament, "do not touch the works of Rabbi Moses of Dessau," although some scholars have recently shown that the Hatam Sofer's own family questioned this understanding of the text.[48] As proto-nationalist thinkers in Eastern Europe began to take issue with the Haskalah in the 1870s, Mendelssohn's edition of the Bible served as a polemical touchstone.[49]

HISTORIANS AND ENCYCLOPEDIAS

Major historians of the Jews followed the collected works and Kayserling in emphasizing the German works. In his multi-volume history of the Jews, Heinrich Graetz (1817–1891), the premier Jewish historian of the nineteenth century, mentioned the *Qohelet Musar* but not the *Be'ur Millot ha-Higgayon* or the commentary on Ecclesiastes. In discussing Mendelssohn's Bible translation ("without aiming at it, he inaugurated the spiritual regeneration of his race") Graetz deemed the commentary a mere obligatory addition since Jews expected a text to be accompanied by a commentary: "Of what value to the depraved taste of Jewish readers was a book without a commentary?"[50] He did not mention the learned essays that constituted the introduction and wrote nothing of the book's contents. He did devote a number of pages to the rabbis who allegedly opposed it and the Talmud students throughout Europe whom it taught to read the Bible and write pellucid Hebrew: "With them Judaism renewed its youth. . . . The Mendelssohn translation speedily resulted in a veritable renaissance of the Jews . . . The inner freedom of the Jews . . . dates from this translation."[51]

In his multi-volume history of the Jews, Simon Dubnow (1860–1941), the leading Jewish historian in the early twentieth century, followed Joseph's biography in the *Gesammelte Schriften* by asserting that Mendelssohn became the "Enlightener of Judaism" only after the Lavater affair in which a Swiss millenarian pastor, Johann Caspar Lavater (1741–1801), publicly challenged Mendelssohn's adherence to Judaism. He did not mention any of Mendelssohn's Hebrew works aside from the Pentateuch translation, which he thought aimed to liberate "Jewish society . . . from its spiritual isolation" by teaching Hebrew and German.[52]

The entry on Mendelssohn in the *Jewish Encyclopedia* (1901), the first modern Jewish encyclopedia, was written by Kayserling, and so it furthered the Ger-

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Shmuel Feiner, *The Jewish Enlightenment* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2003), 131–32.

48. Meir Hildesheimer, "The Attitude of the Hatam Sofer Towards Moses Mendelssohn," *Proceedings of the American Academy for Jewish Research* 60 (1994): 141–87.

49. Sandler, *Be'ur*, 225.

50. Heinrich Graetz, *History of the Jews* 6 vols. (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1967), 5:329; originally published as *Volkstümliche Geschichte der Juden* 6:159.

51. Graetz, *History of the Jews*, 5:335; *Volkstümliche Geschichte der Juden* 6:160–61.

52. Simon Dubnow, *History of the Jews* 5 vols. (South Brunswick, NJ: Thomas Yoseloff, 1967–73), 4:325–36 (quotation at 331).

manifying myth and introduced it to the English-speaking world. In keeping with his earlier biography, the entry first dealt exclusively with the German Mendelssohn and the works that gained him fame. It held to the misconception that Mendelssohn addressed Jewish subjects only in the second half of his life after the Lavater affair. Thus, after recounting this episode, the entry asserts that having recovered from a nervous debility, Mendelssohn turned to his "cherished plan of devoting more of his intellectual activity to the Jews and Judaism." But the entry undermines its own claim by incongruously mentioning his early Hebrew works published (or in the case of *Megillat Qohelet*, initiated and written) before Lavater, without so much as attempting to reconcile the contradictory claims. Furthermore, as in Kayserling's German biography, the entry says nothing of the contents of these works. When it turned to the Pentateuch translation, it presented it as Mendelssohn's effort to teach the Jews German. Yet once again, the entry manages to undercut itself without further explanation:

> The translation of the Pentateuch had an important effect in bringing the Jews to share in the progress of the age. It aroused their interest in the study of Hebrew grammar, which they had so long despised, made them eager for German nationality and culture, and inaugurated a new era in the education of the young and in the Jewish school system.[53]

The contents of this Bible edition are not deemed worthy for discussion, and the very aim and purpose of this work is unclear and confused.

Raphael Mahler (1899–1977), the leading Marxist historian of the Jews, relegated the Hebrew works to the end of his account of Mendelssohn. He devoted one sentence to the contents of the *Qohelet Musar*, and asserted that Mendelssohn wrote nothing in Hebrew after that youthful venture until the commentary on Ecclesiastes; he entirely missed the *Be'ur Millot ha-Higgayon*. In discussing the biblical translation and commentary he focused on Mendelssohn's "negative purpose: to uproot and displace Yiddish as the people's vernacular." His discussion of the contents is restricted to Mendelssohn's effort to reveal the plain meaning (*peshaṭ*) while accepting the homiletical or rabbinically sanctioned interpretation (*derash*) when the two conflicted.[54]

THE JUBILEE EDITION

The "Moses Mendelssohn Kommission" and the "Akademie fűr die Wissenschaft des Judentums" jointly undertook to celebrate the bicentenary of Mendelssohn's birth (1929) by publishing a new "collected works." The goal was to

53. Cyrus Adler et al., eds., *The Jewish Encyclopedia* 12 vols. (New York: Funk & Wagnalls,1901–6), 8:479–85.

54. Raphael Mahler, *A History of Modern Jewry, 1780–1815* (New York: Schocken, 1971), 161–62.

elevate Mendelssohn to the stature of a classic figure through a critical scholarly edition. This edition would have rectified the marginalization of the Hebrew works by devoting a number of volumes to them, but the Nazis' destruction of the crucial volume thwarted that effort for over three decades.[55] Only seven volumes of the Jubilee edition appeared before the cessation of publication in 1938, and two of these had Hebrew contents. Volume nineteen, which contained Mendelssohn's Hebrew and Yiddish correspondence (1761–1785), was edited by Haim Borodianski and published in 1929. Volume fourteen, the crucial volume for the Hebrew works (containing *Qohelet Musar*, *Beʾur Millot ha-Higgayon*, *Megillat Qohelet*, and the three-part introduction to the Pentateuch), which Borodianski also edited, was published in November 1938. It was one of the last Hebrew books to be published in Nazi Germany, and the Nazis immediately "seized and pulped" it.[56] Only a few copies of the volume survived, including the editor's personal copy. This volume of the Hebrew works first became available in 1972 when Friedrich Frommann Verlag issued a facsimile version as part of the resumed publication of the Jubilee edition.[57] While Frommann Verlag's successful effort to revive the edition has made the Hebrew works accessible to scholars of the late twentieth century, the Germanification of Mendelssohn has not abated.

MANDATORY PALESTINE AND ISRAEL

The Germanifying myth has been remarkably tenacious: the tendency to exclude the Hebrew works even held for early Hebrew-language publications. Two studies of Mendelssohn's Pentateuch translation appeared in mandatory Palestine.[58] While these became standard reference works for Judaica scholars, they had no impact on the first Hebrew-language anthology of Mendelssohn's writings devoted to the subject of "Jews and Judaism," which contained only works translated from the German.[59]

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55. Guenther Holzboog, "Zur Geschichte der Jubiläumsausgabe von Moses Mendelssohns Gesammelten Schriften," *Mendelssohn-Studien* 4 (1979): 277–92. For the contrast between the 1929 and 1936 celebrations connected to the Jubilee Edition see Michah Gottlieb, "Publishing the Moses Mendelssohn *Jubiläumsausgabe* in Weimar and Nazi Germany," *LBIYB* 53 (2008): 57–75.

56. Holzboog, "Zur Geschichte der Jubiläumsausgabe," 281.

57. *JubA*, vol. 14 (Hebräische Schriften I), Haim Borodianski (Bar-Dayan), ed.

58. Sandler, *Beʾur*; and Ḥayyim Sheli, *Meḥqar ha-Miqra be-Sifrut ha-Haskalah* (Jerusalem: R. Mass, 1942). In the post-war years an important article was published that utilized the commentary on the Bible in conjunction with the German works. Yet this Hebrew essay was published in an obscure journal that appeared irregularly in London and is known only to specialists. See Isaac Heinemann, "The Unity of Moses Mendelssohn's Religious Philosophy" (in Hebrew), *Meṣuda* 7 (1954): 197–219.

59. *Yerushalayim. Ketavim Qetanim be-ʿInyane Yehudim ve-Yahadut* (Tel Aviv: Masadah/Mosad Bialik, 1947).

THE AUTHORITATIVE BIOGRAPHY

The Germanifying myth also informs Alexander Altmann's magisterial *Moses Mendelssohn: A Biographical Study* (1973).[60] Altmann put the study of Mendelssohn on a new footing by using all available archival and printed sources to provide a thoroughly documented narrative of Mendelssohn's life and thought.[61] He brought his deep scholarship and erudition to bear on his discussions of Mendelssohn's Hebrew writings, and yet, he also carried forward their marginalization by subordinating them to the German works or treating them in relationship to Mendelssohn's reformatory efforts.

Altmann understood Mendelssohn to have had a "dual outlook" in which he tried to maintain his loyalty to two worlds. Yet Altmann's account of those two worlds is strikingly unbalanced. The argument for a dualism implies an equal exploration of both of Mendelssohn's "worlds," that is, equal time to his status as a figure of Enlightenment on the basis of his German works, and to his status as a Jewish thinker on the basis of his German and Hebrew works. In fact, that is far from the case. Altmann provides detailed accounts of all of Mendelssohn's German works. Indeed, the combination of genetic account (*Entstehungsgeschichte*, or history of origins), content summary, and comparison with the works of contemporaries is stunning in its comprehensiveness, albeit often overwhelming in its detail.

In marked contrast, the Hebrew works get short shrift. By and large they appear only insofar as they support his understanding of the German writings. *Qohelet Musar*, for example, gets eight pages because Altmann understands it to belong to the period in which Mendelssohn devoted himself to aesthetic and literary issues (the "bel esprit").[62] Those Hebrew works that do not have an obvious relationship to German ones get mentioned but not discussed. This holds for *Be'ur Millot ha-Higgayon* and *Megillat Qohelet*. Altmann obviously knew their contents, since he quoted them to illuminate German works. He cited a passage from the commentary on Ecclesiastes to explain an issue in the

60. It was originally published by the University of Alabama Press in Tuscaloosa, Alabama, 1973. The volume has been reissued in paperback by the Littman Library of Jewish Civilization (London, 1998). For Altmann's career see Daniel Swetschinski, "Alexander Altmann: A Portrait," in Jehuda Reinharz and Daniel Swetschinski, eds., *Mystics, Philosophers and Politicians: Essays in Jewish Intellectual History in Honor of Alexander Altmann* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1982), 3–14; Paul Mendes-Flohr, "Introduction: Theologian Before the Abyss," in Alfred Ivry, ed., *Alexander Altmann: The Meaning of Jewish Existence; Theological Essays, 1930–1939* (Hanover, NH: University Press of New England, 1991), xiii–xlvii; and the three essays in *LBIYB* 34 (1989): Allan Arkush, "The Contribution of Alexander Altmann to the Study of Moses Mendelssohn," 415–20; Lawrence Fine, "Alexander Altmann's Contribution to the Study of Jewish Mysticism," 421–32; and Alfred L. Ivry, "The Contribution of Alexander Altmann to the Study of Medieval Jewish Philosophy," 433–40.

61. Altmann, *Mendelssohn*, xiv.

62. Ibid., 83–91. The term "bel esprit" appears on 91.

Philosophische Gespräche,[63] and he referred to *Be'ur Millot ha-Higgayon* in his discussion of the prize essay, *Abhandlung über die Evidenz*.[64] He gave an account of when the treatise on logic and the commentary on Ecclesiastes were written and published, but nowhere did he provide a summary, let alone an analysis of their contents.

Altmann never seriously came to grips with the contents of Mendelssohn's edition of the Pentateuch. He provided a detailed genetic account of the work and a long history of the reactions to it, but nowhere did he discuss the work's contents systematically. Rather, he offered the reader two "highlights" from Mendelssohn's commentary on Exodus, namely "his interpretation of the Divine Name (YHWH) and his introduction to Moses' Song."[65] These are short summaries of two discrete issues. Altmann does not connect these highlights with the remainder of the commentary; he leaves the reader perplexed about the work's overall import. Similarly, Altmann cited "two polemical glosses" in the Book of Leviticus (19:17 & 26:14–46) in which Mendelssohn and Naphtali Herz Wessely (1725–1805), who wrote the commentary on Leviticus, disagreed about the interpretation and translation of important passages.[66]

Significantly, Altmann did not employ this method of "highlights" for any of Mendelssohn's German works. The only way to account for the disparity between the way Altmann treated the German works and the Pentateuch translation and commentary is his assumption that the Hebrew works simply did not deserve equal treatment: they were important for Mendelssohn's efforts to reform the Jews but not for their intellectual content.

Yet perhaps this marginalization of the Hebrew works should not come as a surprise: Altmann gave voice to it in his Preface in pointing to Mendelssohn's two worlds.

> To what extent the two disparate worlds of Judaism and modern Enlightenment jostled each other in his mind and to what degree he could harmonize them are questions that admit of no facile answer. It is only in the aggregate of a multitude of accounts of experiences, reactions and statements on his part that his attitude becomes fully articulate.

Altmann enumerated the main pieces of evidence he would examine.

> His reply to Lavater's challenge, his formidable Bible project, his tussles with the rabbis, the formulations of his view of Judaism in *Jerusalem*, his response to Lessing's *Nathan the Wise*, the way he educated his children—these and many more

63. Ibid., 64.
64. Ibid., 119.
65. Ibid., 408–13.
66. Ibid., 414–16.

items in his biography add up to the final answer to the question: what was his Judaism like?[67]

Conspicuously absent are any of the Hebrew works aside from the Bible translation. These notable omissions indicate that Altmann did not admit the Hebrew works as evidence; they consequently did not play a role in his formulation of Mendelssohn's Judaism.

Altmann thus developed his dualism in a one-sided manner: he treated only one of Mendelssohn's worlds exhaustively. He explored at great length Mendelssohn's intellectual agenda in general philosophy as expressed in the German works.[68] He never posed the same question for the Hebrew works. He simply assumed that the German writings on Judaism were the true locus of Mendelssohn's beliefs. He subscribed to the Germanifying myth by a priori excluding the possibility of the Hebrew writings containing an intellectual agenda separate from that of the German works that should be taken into consideration in portraying Mendelssohn's "dual outlook."

The end result is a Mendelssohn not far removed from Kayserling's. Mendelssohn is a German writer and philosopher who was committed to the reform of his people. His dualism is unequal in that in his German writings he is a serious intellectual whereas in the Hebrew ones he is only unswerving in his loyalties.[69] The substance of his Jewish thought goes unexamined except as it is expressed in the pertinent German works.[70]

MENDELSSOHN AS RADICAL DEIST

In his reading of Mendelssohn as a radical deist, Allan Arkush turns Kayserling's and Altmann's conclusions on their head while adhering to the Germanifying myth. In treating the issues of historicity of revelation and the authenticity of the biblical text, for example, Arkush condescendingly dismissed Mendelssohn's

67. Ibid., xiii–xiv.

68. Altmann aimed in his book on the early works to restore Mendelssohn's stature as a philosopher, thus contravening Brandis' view. See Altmann, *Moses Mendelssohns Frühschriften zur Metaphysik* (Tübingen: J.C.B. Mohr, 1969), v–vi.

69. In a later essay Altmann would emphasize the fact that Mendelssohn was a "Jew by conviction, not merely by birth." See "Moses Mendelssohn as the Archetypal German Jew," in Jehuda Reinharz and Walter Schatzberg, eds., *The Jewish Response to German Culture: From the Enlightenment to the Second World War* (Hanover, NH: University Press of New England, 1985), 22–24.

70. Altmann also ignored the Hebrew works in the essays he wrote after the publication of the biography, in which he concentrated on key philosophical issues, e.g., miracles, proofs for the existence of God, and political thought as expressed in the *Jerusalem*. See *Essays in Jewish Intellectual History* (Hanover, NH: University Press of New England, 1981), 119–89; and *Die trostvolle Aufklärung: Studien zur Metaphysik und politischen Theorie Moses Mendelssohns* (Stuttgart: Frommann-Holzboog, 1982).

view in the *Or li-Netivah* as a "timeworn medieval argument."[71] He either chose to ignore or was unaware of the fact that Mendelssohn offered a sustained argument for the authenticity of the biblical text. Similarly, Arkush contended that for Mendelssohn "revelation was, in effect, of secondary importance," totally ignoring Mendelssohn's pronouncements on the nature of revelation in his commentary on the book of Exodus.[72] In his concluding characterization of Mendelssohn Arkush made no provision for the Hebrew writer: "a philosopher of religion and a faithful practitioner of Judaism."[73]

Arkush effectively recapitulated Joseph Mendelssohn's view that Mendelssohn calculatingly continued to observe Jewish law and maintain the appearance of belief since otherwise he could not credibly influence his fellow Jews to accept the refashioned Judaism that would make possible their entrance into civil society.[74] The myth appears to have reached its endpoint in Arkush's reading.[75]

RECENT SCHOLARSHIP

In the past two decades there has been a renewal of interest in Mendelssohn in which scholars have begun to supersede the Germanifying canon.[76] The edi-

71. Allan Arkush, *Moses Mendelssohn and the Enlightenment* (Albany: SUNY Press, 1994), 177–79, 232 n. 24.

72. Ibid., 256.

73. Ibid., 289.

74. On Mendelssohn's effort to maintain his credentials see ibid., 258, 260, 291.

75. Some influential journal articles in English of the 1980s and 1990s also considered only the German works. See, for example, Kenneth Hart Green, "Moses Mendelssohn's Opposition to the *Herem*: The First Step Toward Denominationalism," *Modern Judaism* 12 (February, 1992): 39–60; Arnold Eisen, "Divine Legislation as 'Ceremonial Script': Mendelssohn on the Commandments," *AJS Review* 15 (Fall, 1990): 239–68; and Michael Morgan, "History and Modern Jewish Thought: Spinoza and Mendelssohn on the Ritual Law," *Judaism* 30 (1981): 467–79. Shmuel Feiner's popular biography, *Moses Mendelssohn: Sage of Modernity* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2010), while acknowledging the Hebrew works, remains fairly close to the Kayserling/Altmann model. Feiner discusses the contents of the *Qohelet Musar* (51–55), gives a brief account of the *Be'ur Millot ha-Higgayon* (74–76) and an even more cursory account of the commentary on Ecclesiastes (79–80). In treating the translation and commentary on the Pentateuch, Feiner spends less than two pages on the content (131–32) but many pages on the work's genesis and the ensuing controversies.

76. One publication that testifies to growing interest is the anthology published by Cambridge University Press, Daniel O. Dahlstrom, ed., *Moses Mendelssohn: Philosophical Writings* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997). This volume is most welcome in making available the *Philosophical Writings* and *On Evidence in Metaphysical Sciences*. Nonetheless, it also reinforces the Mendelssohn myth by only including German works. Other English-language anthologies do the same. For example, Alfred Jospe, trans. & ed., *Jerusalem and Other Jewish Writings* (New York: Schocken, 1969) contains a few brief selections from the Hebrew works: a few pages from the introduction to the Bible translation (pp. 150–52) and two brief selections from the Bible commentary (pp. 137 & 149).

tors of this volume both published books devoted to Mendelssohn's Hebrew works.[77] Carola Hilfrich wrote a searching investigation of Mendelssohn's semiotics of representation and idolatry based on both the German and Hebrew works.[78] W.Z. Harvey has used the Hebrew and German texts in articles on Mendelssohn's politics, view of the land of Israel, and the use of Kabbalah.[79] Grit Schorch has written a study of Mendelssohn's "language politics" utilizing both the German and Hebrew works.[80] In his major biography in French, Dominique Bourel devoted a chapter to the translation and commentary on the Pentateuch as well as discussing the translation of Psalms and the earlier commentary on the Book of Ecclesiastes.[81] Michah Gottlieb has integrated the Hebrew works into an analysis of Mendelssohn as a philosopher trying to formulate his own position between Maimonides' Aristotelianism and Spinoza's anti-supernaturalism.[82] In collaboration with three colleagues Gottlieb has also produced an anthology of Mendelssohn's thought that includes selections from the Hebrew works.[83] Gideon Freudenthal has explored the "semiotic" foundation of Mendelssohn's philosophy and utilized both the German and Hebrew works to elucidate his notions of idolatry and the possibility of enlightened religion.[84] As part of the resuscitated *Jubiläumsausgabe*, Frommann Publishers has produced German translations of the Hebrew works. The three main early works, *Qohelet Musar*, *Beʾur Millot ha-Higgayon*, and *Megillat Qohelet*, appear in one volume, the Pentateuch translation in another.[85]

77. Breuer, *Limits*; Sorkin, *Mendelssohn*.

78. Carola Hilfrich, *Lebendige Schrift: Repräsentation und Idolatrie in Moses Mendelssohns Philosophie und Exegese des Judentums* (Munich: Wilhelm Fink, 2000).

79. See W.Z. Harvey's "Mendelssohn's Heavenly Politics," in A.L. Ivry, E.R. Wolfson, and A. Arkush, eds., *Perspectives on Jewish Thought and Mysticism Dedicated to the Memory of Alexander Altmann* (London: Harwood, 1998), 403–12; "Moses Mendelssohn on the Land of Israel" (in Hebrew), in A. Ravitzky, ed., *Ereṣ Yisraʾel ba-Hagut ha-Yehudit be-ʿet ha-Ḥadashah* (Jerusalem: Ben-Zvi Institute, 1998), 301–12; "Mendelssohn and Maimon on the Tree of Knowledge," in R. Fontaine, A. Schatz, and I. Zwiep, eds., *Sepharad in Ashkenaz: Medieval Knowledge and Eighteenth-Century Enlightened Jewish Discourse* (Amsterdam: Koninklijke Nederlandse Akademie, 2007), 185–92; and "Why Philosophers Quote Kabbalah: The Cases of Mendelssohn and Rosenzweig," *Studia Judaica* 16 (2008): 118–25.

80. Grit Schorch, *Moses Mendelssohns Sprachpolitik* (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2012).

81. Bourel, *Mendelssohn*.

82. Michah Gottlieb, *Faith and Freedom: Moses Mendelssohn's Theological-Political Thought* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011).

83. Michah Gottlieb, ed., *Moses Mendelssohn: Writings on Judaism, Christianity and the Bible* (Waltham: Brandeis University Press, 2011). The second section, "Writings on the Bible" (pp. 175–229), includes selections from the *Commentary on Ecclesiastes* (pp. 175–81) and the *Sefer Netivot ha-Shalom*, including the introduction and the commentary (pp. 189–229). The third section, "Miscellany," contains a selection from the introduction to *Beʾur Millot ha-Higgayon* (pp. 235–40).

84. Freudenthal, *Religion*.

85. *JubA*, 20:1 and *JubA*, 9:1.

* * *

This volume was conceived with the aim of making the Hebrew writings accessible to English readers, and the introductions and annotations have been provided with this in mind. These selections highlight Mendelssohn's erudition and originality, his subtlety and graceful style. They invite and enable readers to integrate their contents into a broader understanding of Mendelssohn. The Hebrew works are too important to remain the exclusive possession of cognoscenti trained in Hebrew texts. These texts should become the province of all who are interested in engaging with Mendelssohn himself, rather than the "image" or "uses" of Mendelssohn, and plumbing the depths of his thought.

I

QOHELET MUSAR [PREACHER OF MORALS]

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EDITORS' INTRODUCTION

Moses Mendelssohn's first work in Hebrew, the *Qohelet Musar*, was also his most obscure: there is uncertainty about the authorship, date of publication, and reception of this journal. Although Mendelssohn's authorship was never seriously questioned, the work appeared anonymously and some of his contemporaries did mention a co-author. Modern scholars have been divided on this issue. Some, adducing internal literary evidence, argue that Mendelssohn had a collaborator; others, pointing to the unsuccessful attempts to identify such an individual, have suggested that Mendelssohn was the sole author. The editors of this volume subscribe to the latter position: we believe that the multiple voices, styles, and fictive characters that appear in these pages are a product of Mendelssohn's literary invention, much like similar devices employed in his early German writings.[1]

To add to the work's obscurity, the date of publication is also unclear. The text is undated, and while all evidence points to publication in the mid to late 1750s, there is no agreement about the exact year.[2] Finally, there is no record of how the work was received or why the author ceased publication. Some

1. The primary evidence for a collaborator by the name of Tuvia is based on the marginal notation in Solomon Dubno's copy of *Qohelet Musar* and Isaac Euchel's biography of Mendelssohn; see Euchel, *Toledot*, 13. Issachar Edelstein suggested that while Mendelssohn had inspired this work, he did not actually write any of it himself; see "*Ha-Ḥibbur Qohelet Musar*," in Ludwig Blau, ed., *Festschrift zum 50 jährigen Bestehen der Franz-Josef-Landesrabbinerschule in Budapest* (Budapest: Alexander Kohut Memorial Foundation, 1927), 60–61. Meir Gilon has argued that internal evidence supports the claim of a collaborator, and on the basis of style and content he attributed essays 1, 4, and 6 to Mendelssohn, and essays 2, 3, and 5 to his collaborator; see Gilon, *Qohelet Musar*, 11–17, 89–97. Alexander Altmann, on the other hand, suggested that the collaborator may have been Mendelssohn's invention; see Altmann, *Mendelssohn*, 83–91. On Mendelssohn's use of fictive characters and multiple voices in his German writings of these same years, cf. *Philosophische Gespräche* and *Uber die Empfindungen* in *JubA*, 1:1–123.

2. According to Gilon, *Qohelet Musar*, 9–11, and 83–89, the date of publication was sometime in the spring of 1755. Altmann, *Mendelssohn*, 84 followed Simon Hochheimer, *Über Mendelssohns Tod* (Vienna & Leipzig: Joh. Jakob Stabel, 1786), 68 and gave the date as 1758.

commentators have claimed that it was suppressed by the communal authorities in Berlin. This claim invites our skepticism, since all the evidence that supports it is circumstantial. Moreover, the claim originated with an enterprising *maskil* who was only too happy to promote the now conventional narrative of rabbinic or communal opposition to the Haskalah.[3] Given these uncertainties, we have to base our knowledge of the *Qohelet Musar* directly on the brief text of sixteen pages, or one octavo.

The text exhibits all the defining characteristics of a "moral weekly." The moral weekly was an intimate journal distinguished by a fictional narrator who used letters and essays, conversations and incidents, to discuss matters interesting to a predominantly middle-class audience: manners, morals, and aesthetics. The genre was popular in Germany in the second quarter of the eighteenth century, and Mendelssohn contributed to one such journal, *Der Chamäleon*, in the mid-1750s.[4]

The *Qohelet Musar* consisted of six sections or essays (in Hebrew: *she'arim*, or "gates") published as two issues of a moral weekly in Hebrew, the only example of its kind. A number of Mendelssohn's German friends in Berlin tried to establish journals in the 1750s; that he tried his hand at it is therefore not unexpected.[5] However, the fact that he tried to compose such a work in Hebrew was surprising, since this was an innovation that presented significant challenges.

The intimate, informal style of the moral weekly presupposed the ability to address readers in a direct colloquial prose. Although Hebrew had long served as the written language of the rabbinic and literary élite, it was not a spoken language and lacked the immediacy of everyday usage. Late medieval and early modern rabbinic writers of moralistic works had employed a style that stitched together fragments and phrases from biblical and post-biblical texts, frequently in rhyme, and the effect was often opaque, if not baroque. Mendelssohn adopted this literary style and exploited the Hebrew Bible to serve as the basis of this modern genre of moralistic and philosophical reflection.[6] *Qohelet Musar* was thus written as a pastiche of Biblical passages assembled through direct quotation, the recombination of biblical phrases, and even reversals of meaning or

3. The claim has its origins in Euchel's *Toledot*, 13. Gilon tries to support the claim with additional evidence; see his *Qohelet Musar*, 98.

4. These contributions are reprinted in *JubA*, 2:111–45. On them see Altmann, *Mendelssohn*, 78–80. The standard study of the moral weekly is Wolfgang Martens, *Die Botschaft der Tugend: Die Aufklärung im Spiegel der deutschen Moralischen Wochenschriften* (Stuttgart: Metzler, 1968). The moral weekly was a German imitation of Joseph Addison and Richard Steele's *Tatler* and *Spectator*.

5. Friedrich Nicolai and Gotthold Ephraim Lessing both were engaged with journals in the 1750s. See Gilon, *Qohelet Musar*, 85.

6. Mendelssohn was drawn to this style by the fourteenth-century Yedaiah b. Abraham Bedersi's *Beḥinat 'Olam*, which he partly translated in 1755–56; see *GS*, 6:425–28, and *JubA*, 10,1:265–68.

context. Although Mendelssohn aimed for a more lucid and accessible prose, the final product still made high demands on the reader, requiring a significant immersion in biblical literature. The audience was thus limited to readers with years of traditional education. Whether there were enough cognoscenti capable of appreciating such a Hebrew moral weekly, and whether Mendelssohn ceased publication of *Qohelet Musar* due to a lack of an audience, remain open questions. Whatever the case, this form of *melişah* and its requisite virtuosity influenced Haskalah prose authors until the end of the nineteenth century.[7]

The choice of subjects and the manner in which they were treated may have further limited the audience. The six sections addressed such related themes as the glories and order of God's creation and the vindication of providence (sections 2, 3, and 4); the nature of true pleasure and perfection (section 4); as well as the beauties of the Hebrew language and the need to redress its recent neglect (sections 2 and 6). With the exception of the last theme, these were the very ones that Mendelssohn discussed in his German works of the period.[8]

Mendelssohn treated the philosophical themes just as he had in his early German writings, deriving the intellectual framework from Christian Wolff, the philosopher of the early German Enlightenment. Although Wolff is never mentioned in *Qohelet Musar*, Mendelssohn's unstated but unmistakable agenda was to show the congruence of Wolffian philosophy and Judaism. His method was to present an idea drawn from Wolff as if it were a dictum of sound reason and then support and illustrate it with passages from various Jewish sources such as the Bible, Talmud, Midrash, and medieval philosophical treatises. Mendelssohn apparently thought that by introducing Wolffian concepts he could educate his Jewish readers in contemporary philosophy. His long-term aim was to revive the discipline of philosophy in Hebrew and with it to renew the study and use of the Hebrew language, which, like the serious engagement with Biblical exegesis, languished on the margins of European Jewish culture.

As such, while Wolff goes unmentioned, a wide range of Hebrew texts—the Bible and biblical commentaries, Talmud and Midrash, philosophical and ethical works—is regularly cited and discussed. In this respect *Qohelet Musar* differed from German moral weeklies, which purveyed a sort of generic nondenominational Christianity or, in the idiom of the time, "natural religion": they at times discussed issues of Christian theology, but they never dealt directly with scripture or theological works.[9] In contrast, Mendelssohn presented a robust and textually rooted Judaism. Conspicuous among the philosophical and ethical

7. See Robert Alter, *The Invention of Hebrew Prose* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1988), 17–41. On the style of the eighteenth-century moralist works see Gilon, *Qohelet Musar*, 110–19.

8. Gilon, *Qohelet Musar*, 55–74.

9. Martens, *Die Botschaft der Tugend*, 170, 213–14.

texts Mendelssohn used were those of medieval Sephardic (Iberian) Jews, especially Maimonides and Judah ha-Levi. To revive the tradition of philosophy in Hebrew it was imperative to bring these central works back into Jewish discourse.

With its optimistic themes and Wolffian approach, *Qohelet Musar* was clearly aligned with the moral weeklies and other Enlightenment literature. It stood apart from contemporary Hebrew moralistic works that focused on such dark themes as the fear of death and punishment, the power of Satan and the vanity of life.[10] The work was characteristic of the early Haskalah in aiming at intellectual renewal through the revival of neglected internal disciplines and engagement with the larger culture. Put differently, Mendelssohn used a current genre to fashion a Hebrew literature whose pious contents were consonant with contemporary philosophy. That Mendelssohn's effort was more pioneering than accomplished may be largely responsible for the work's obscurity. Yet the importance of *Qohelet Musar* should not be underestimated: some two decades later the founders of the flagship journal of the Haskalah, *Ha-Me'assef* [The Assembler], looked to it as a model and point of departure.

THE TEXT AND ITS PUBLICATION HISTORY

The obscurity of *Qohelet Musar* is underscored by the paucity of original copies that have survived: there are only four extant copies of the first three sections, and only one extant copy of the last three sections. Sections 1 and 3, and the latter half of section 2, were reprinted in *Ha-Me'assef* of 1785 (pp. 90–95, 103–105), and the same material was again reprinted in the early nineteenth-century Maskilic journal *Bikkure ha-'Ittim* (1822; pp. 85–90, 96–98). The work appeared in its entirety in Issachar Edelstein, "*Ha-Ḥibbur Qohelet Musar* [The Work *Qohelet Musar*]," in Ludwig Blau, ed., *Festschrift zum 50 jährigen Bestehen der Franz-Josef-Landesrabbinerschule in Budapest* (Budapest, 1927), pp. 62–76, and again a decade later in volume 14 of *Moses Mendelssohn Gesammelte Schriften Jubiläumsausgabe*, edited by Haim Borodianski (Bar-Dayan) with notes and textual emendations (Berlin, 1938, pp. 1–21). It has also been reprinted as an appendix to Gilon, *Qohelet Musar*, pp. 157–80. Gilon based his text on photoreproductions of the original, and added helpful annotations.

The selection presented here is based on the surviving original, with judicious use of the annotations and occasional emendations offered in the texts published by Borodianski and Gilon. In a few instances, noted in our annotations, the translation is based on further emendation of these Hebrew editions.

10. Gilon, *Qohelet Musar*, 120–39.

SECONDARY LITERATURE

The most detailed and authoritative study is Meir Gilon's *Qohelet Musar le-Mendelson ʿal Reqaʿ Tequfato* cited above. This is a painstakingly thorough analysis unlikely to be superseded, although some of Gilon's conclusions, especially his insistence on Mendelssohn's co-author and the work's suppression by communal authorities, remain open to question. Altmann offers a judicious if brief account in his biography; see Altmann, *Mendelssohn*, 83–91. Both Gilon and Altmann have addressed the conclusions of Jacob Toury, "Die Anfänge des jüdischen Zeitungswesens in Deutschland," *Bulletin des Leo Baeck Instituts* 10 (1967): 93–123, and Hermann M.Z. Meyer, "Kohelet Mussar," *Bulletin des Leo Baeck Instituts* 10 (1967): 48–65, regarding authorship, dating, and publication. In his work contextualizing Mendelssohn as part of the religious Enlightenment, Sorkin sees the work as part of Mendelssohn's effort to revive the study of philosophy in Hebrew; see Sorkin, *Mendelssohn*, 15–18. More recently, two scholars have turned to the linguistic and cultural dimensions of this work: Jeremy Dauber discussed Mendelssohn's partial Hebrew translation of an English masterpiece in "New Thoughts on 'Night Thoughts': Mendelssohn and Translation," *Journal of Modern Jewish Studies* 2 (2003): 132–147; and Jonathan Karp focused on the aesthetic interests that Mendelssohn sought to advance in "The Aesthetic Difference: Moses Mendelssohn's *Kohelet Musar* and the Inception of the Berlin Haskalah," in R. Brann and A. Sutcliffe, eds., *Renewing the Past, Reconfiguring Jewish Culture* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2004), 93–120. For a general introduction in German, see Andrea Schatz, "Einleitung: Prediger der Moral (Kohelet Musar)," *JubA*, 20,1:xv–xxxvii.

NOTES TO THE TRANSLATION

The selections of *Qohelet Musar* presented here are translated from a photo-reproduction of the original. The most pronounced stylistic feature of these essays, namely the interweaving of biblical phrases and half-verses into almost every line, pose a particular difficulty. This translation focused on capturing some of the allusiveness and poetic quality of this biblicism while at the same time striving to maintain readability. The biblical verses rendered here do not generally accord with any standard English version of Scripture; stylistic and contextual demands, in addition to the frequent melding and splicing of unrelated biblical phrases, necessitated interpretative license. Note also that in those instances where Mendelssohn reversed the original meaning of a biblical verse, turning a positive statement into the negative or vice versa, we have indicated this alongside the source citation as follows: (rev. [citation]).

SELECTIONS FROM *QOHELET MUSAR*

Section Two

A LETTER WRITTEN FROM A CERTAIN PERSON TO ANOTHER

From me . . . to . . . Greetings.[1]

I have clearly seen how our Jewish brethren have abandoned our Holy language, and I am *deeply distressed* (Jon. 4:9). I don't know *how this evil happened* (Judg. 20:3) *and what they perceived and what they experienced* (Esth. 9:26) [that brought them] to fling to the ground *the proud crown of glorious beauty* (Isa. 28:1). Is she not the finest of languages? The word of God that came to His prophets through a vision was in the Hebrew tongue,[2] and He conceived and shaped His world in this language. This is discussed in the fourth part of *Kuzari*, section 25, in his explication of *Sefer Yeṣirah*, and I shall cite his words: "The divine, created language °(the *Kuzari* refers to Hebrew as 'the created language' because it appeared at the very moment of God's creation of the world; other languages were human conventions that appeared after the dispersion [of the Tower of Babel])[3] that God taught man and placed upon his tongue and in his heart is without doubt the most perfect of all languages and the most suitable to the objects they describe, as it is written: *And whatever the man called each living creature, that would be its name* (Gen. 2:19), meaning that each creature was worthy of its name, a name which was fitting and indicative of its nature °(that

1. The presentation of this essay in the form of a letter was one of the literary devices that Mendelssohn employed throughout *Qohelet Musar* and in his early German writings as well; such devices were not uncommon in eighteenth-century belles-lettres.

2. *leshon ʿever*. Although Mendelssohn generally used the prevalent rabbinic and medieval idiom *leshon ha-qodesh* ("the Holy language") to refer to Hebrew, *Qohelet Musar* employed both terms; see *Kuzari* II:68.

3. In order to make clear that this comment was his own gloss on the *Kuzari*, Mendelssohn printed this parenthetical explanation in Rashi script rather than the block lettering used throughout.

is, even though in other languages names are assigned to all objects, these nouns are no more appropriate to their nature than any other noun; this is not true of Hebrew, in which the designation of nouns is appropriate to the nature of the things). This demonstrates the superiority and advantage of Hebrew . . ." until "And it is said °(in *Sefer Yeṣirah*) with regard to writing."[4]

This [neglect] *should not remain as it is* (Ez. 21:31) for we are obligated to learn Hebrew, as we see in Maimonides' statement in his commentary to *Pirqe Avot* 2:1:[5] "And afterwards the *Mishnah* stated that one must heed a precept that appears to be less weighty—such as rejoicing on the festivals and learning Hebrew—as much as a precept whose weightiness is clear." Despite this, I have looked all around and found no one endeavoring *to restore* the language *to its position, as it once was* (Gen. 40:13). Some say [by way of excuse]: "With the four winds of heaven *the Eternal has scattered us* (Lam. 4:16) in the lands of nations *who do not understand* our language (Gen. 11:7), and like slaves in the house of their masters we have learned their language and have forgotten our own." However, this response *should be discarded as chaff is discarded before* eastern *winds in the hills* (Ps. 68:3, Isa. 17:13); after all, despite the fact that our forefathers were *sold as slaves and maidservants* in Egypt (Esth. 7:4), they did not forget their language, as indicated in the passage of Mekhilta to Exodus.[6]

There are also those who *have made their brow brazen* and *look to the holy one of Israel* (Isa. 48:4, 17:7), namely R. Solomon [= Rashi], who in his commentary to the Talmudic dictum °(Ber. 28b) "Restrain your children from *higgayon*" explained that this referred to the study of Scripture.[7] Behold, *they have made falsehood their refuge and taken shelter in treachery* (Isa. 28:15). Aside from the fact that *they shut their eyes from seeing* (Isa. 44:18) the explanation of Maimonides, who suggested that *higgayon* was the study of argumentation and dialectic,[8] they also

4. The text here skipped a line of the *Kuzari* and concluded the citation with a reference to the subsequent discussion of the *Kuzari* (and *Sefer Yeṣirah*) on the written alphabet.

5. Mendelssohn seized on Maimonides' identification of the study of Hebrew as one of the less-weighty precepts, but a precept nonetheless. It also implied that the neglect of Hebrew was a long-standing problem that the Mishnah itself was attempting to rectify.

6. Mekh. *Bo,* section 5, where the Sages pointed to the virtues that had preserved the national distinctiveness of the Israelites during their enslavement in Egypt: "R. Eliezer ha-Kappar Beribbi says: [The] Israelites were in possession of four precepts more valuable than anything else in the world: they were above all suspicion with regard to sexual impropriety and with regard to talebearing; they did not change their names; and they did not change their language."

7. The question regarding this dictum was how to interpret *higgayon*, and by extension, the thrust of the cautionary directive. Rashi's comment read as follows: "Do not allow [your children] to be overly preoccupied with Scripture because it entices; another interpretation: [restrain them] from the prattle of children." Compare Mendelssohn's discussion here with his later discussion in *Be'ur Millot ha-Higgayon*, below, p. 69.

8. While it is not clear that Maimonides explicitly defined *higgayon* in these words, Jewish scholars living in Muslim lands had already begun to use the word *higgayon* to denote the Arabic *mantiq*, usually understood as the science of logic. This identification was evident in the work of the Ibn Tibbon family, the foremost medieval Hebrew translators.

muddled their vision and conceived lies (Isa. 28:7, 59:13) with regard to the words of Rashi. For his opinion was that we should not spend all our time in the study of Scripture and the *masorah*, like those men who delight in finding one letter or vowel point never imagined by earlier scholars; as he himself wrote: "do not be overly preoccupied with Scripture."[9] It is better for us to study the [text of the] Torah transmitted to our Sages, for this is our life and length of days. But to slacken entirely from the study of the language—far be it from a saintly individual [i.e., Rashi] to have intended such a thing. On the contrary, [the study of Hebrew] is a precept and Rashi himself provides testimony and vindicates my point in his commentary on Deut. 11:19, [*and teach them to your children*] *to constantly speak about them*, to which he wrote: "From here our Sages learn[10] that when an infant begins to speak, his father begins to speak with him in Hebrew and to teach him Torah; if he neglected to do this, it is as if he has buried him."

Let us learn from the other nations, each with their own native language; they neither rested nor reposed until they fully developed their language. Why should we *lie sprawling* (Isa. 56:10) and not emulate their deeds with our own language, which is the finest and most ancient in time?

Behold, my beloved brother, from the day I first knew you I understood that you too were grieved at the abandonment of our language. About a month ago when I was rejoicing with you in affection and we spoke about this matter you suggested a *cure for this malady* (Hos. 5:13), to publish *the words of the wise and their riddles* (Prov. 1:6), *words upon words, some here, some there* (Isa. 28:10), words written with refined language[11] so that it may please their readers. And the Hebrews[12] *will look up and see* (Isa. 42:18) that our language can be employed on all occasions, giving voice to misery, *to sing soulful songs that rejoice to exultation* (Prov. 25:20, Job 3:22) or to admonish *evildoers at the gate* (Isa. 29:21); *they will accept rebuke* (rev. Jer. 2:30) and *speak* Hebrew[13] *as a familiar language* (Jer. 23:31).

And now, my brother, *my hand shall maintain you and my arm will strengthen you* (Ps. 89:22). Here are some refined words prepared on the precept of trusting

9. Mendelssohn was suggesting that in this instance *higgayon* was derived from the Hebrew noun *hagahah*, i.e., annotation, thus reading Rashi's interpretation as "do not allow your children to be overly preoccupied with textual annotations." Cf. his lengthy discussion of the word *higgayon* in his introduction to *Be'ur Millot ha-Higgayon*, pp. 66–69. Mendelssohn's dismissive comment regarding "men who delight in finding one letter or vowel point never imagined by earlier generations" seemed to be directed at contemporary Christian scholars who had begun to argue that the masoretic version of the Hebrew Bible was marred by textual corruptions and was in need of scholarly emendation. Mendelssohn's concern with biblical criticism of this sort came to the fore in the introduction to *Sefer Netivot ha-Shalom*; see part IV of this book.

10. Sifre to Deut. 11:19, § 46.

11. *melişah*.

12. By substituting the letter *bet* for a *vav*, Mendelssohn offered up a homonymic play on the verse from Isa. 42:18, which had "Blind ones (*ve-ha-'ivrim*), look up and see."

13. The text reads *leshon ha-'ivrim*, rendered more accurately if awkwardly "the language of the Hebrews."

in God, which I have written down for reasons known to you; it is up to you to decide whether to *distribute them to Jacob and scatter them in Israel* (Gen. 49:7) or to consign them *to a devouring fire* (Isa. 9:4). *May our God's favor be with us, that the work of our hands prosper* (Ps. 90:17). May our words be acceptable *to those who understand speech* (Isa. 3:3) and may they join with us. *Peace unto you* (1 Sam. 25:6).

EVERYTHING THAT GOD DOES IS FOR THE GOOD[14]

I observed that all living beings under the sun, the good and the pure, *the foolish and the ignorant*, *have trust in* the Eternal our God (Ecc. 4:7, 9:2, 9:4, Ps. 49:11). They are *pleased with their own talk, selah*[15] (Ps. 49:14), [saying] all together: "*Trust in God . . . what harm can man do to me*? (Ps. 56:12)." [Yet] I see that *as they grew proud, they sinned* with regard to this fundamental principle (Hos. 4:7), and that *the wise is superior to the fool as the sun's brightness in the heavens* is superior to a *gloom with no dawn* (Ecc. 2:13, Job 37:21, Isa. 8:22). For the common man *places his confidence in God* (Ps. 78:7) in order that *he become rich and that his wealth will endure* (rev. Job 15:29), that he may have much *silver and gold . . . and the luxuries of commoners* (Ecc. 2:8), and that he may see *his children endure* and *his offspring plentiful enough for nations* (Job 21:8, Gen. 48:19).

However, *if something were to try him* (Job 4:2): if *thieves who plunder in the night come upon him* (Obad. 1:5) and *strip the mantle off the cloak* (Mic. 2:8); or if a man to whom he lent silver and gold went to another land without repaying him; if his ships raised their ensign in the Sea of Tarshish and God sent a stormy wind and *wrecked the ship* (Ps. 48:8) and all that was upon it *was overcome by mighty rushing waters* (rev. Ps. 32:6); *if the ruler's anger was roused against him to act wickedly* (Ecc. 10:4, Ps. 141:4), *to lay his hands on everything dear to him* (Lam. 1:10), be it ox or sheep, taking it all away while *putting him into a pit, chained in bronze fetters* (Ps. 88:7, 2 Kgs. 25:7); [or] when *death climbs through his windows* (Jer. 9:20) and *slays those dear to his eyes* (Lam. 2:4)—his son and daughter, brother and sister, *wife of his bosom or his closest friend* (Deut. 13:7).

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14. Ber. 60b. The full passage reads as follows: "A person should always accustom himself to say 'Everything that God does is for the good.' This is like the story of R. Akiba who was once traveling, and upon reaching a certain town, made inquiries in search of lodging. He was refused, and declared: 'Everything that God does is for the good.' He went to sleep in an open field, and had with him a rooster, a donkey, and a lamp. The lamp was extinguished by a gust of wind, a wild cat came and ate the rooster, and a lion ate the donkey. R. Akiba declared: 'Everything that God does is for the good.' That very night a group of bandits took the residents of the town captive, and R. Akiba said to them: 'Did I not say to you that everything that God does is for the good.'" Rashi explained that the lamp and the animals belonging to R. Akiba would have attracted the attention of the bandits and resulted in his captivity; their loss ultimately saved him.

15. For Mendelssohn's understanding of the word *selah*, see *Be'ur Millot ha-Higgayon* below, pp. 68–69.

Then [as all this befalls him] *the fool sits desolate and presses his hands together* (Ecc. 4:5, Ezra 9:4); *he feels the pain of his flesh* (Job 14:22), *grumbling in his tent* (Deut. 1:27): "Why did God do this to me? In vain *I put my confidence in Him* (Ps. 78:7), and my trust for naught. God cast a jealous eye on me, *holding His right hand like a foe* (Lam. 2:4) to destroy me." *The sweet light for those who behold the sun was darkened into night* (Ecc. 11:7, Amos 5:8); the sadness of his heart fells him before his time, *and he descends to Sheol, head covered in mourning* (Gen. 37:35, Esth. 6:12). *Like a deaf viper* the fool *stops his ears; he will not listen to the voice of the wise who comes to argue with him* (Ps. 58:5–6, Prov. 29:9). For all of God's deeds are with us; He did not reject us. His ways are not like this, *to despise the toil of His hands* (Job 10:3) which He fashioned so magnificently; He alone has a portion in His world, and *everything was made for a purpose* (Prov. 16:4)—*how did He become his enemy* (Isa. 63:10)?

It is not so. Rather, all of God's deeds are for our good and to sustain us. Either *sorrow and sighing will quickly flee* (Joel 4:4, Isa. 35:10) *and relief and deliverance will take their place* (Esth. 4:14); or through [these tribulations] one is delivered from far worse troubles. But *the fool* quickly *vents his rage and tests*[16] *the Holy One of Israel* (Prov. 29:11, Ps. 78:41). He says: "*By God, who has deprived me of justice, to wrong me in his cause* (Job 27:2, Lam. 3:36); *surely His arm is not unable* (Job 24:25, Isa. 50:2) to increase His goodness or to save me from the storm of troubles, and not punish me with even greater afflictions."

My friends, *turn away from the tent* of this fool (Num. 16:26) and *do not be silenced by his iniquity* (Jer. 51:6). *For he has counseled deviance before the Eternal* (Deut. 13:6) *and has attributed to Him things that are not so* (2 Kgs. 17:9). Turn your eyes toward the house of Ahituv[17] our friend, and see how *the Eternal singles out His holy ones for Himself* (Ps. 4:4), how He *inflicted extraordinary troubles upon him*, *smiting him with unceasing blows* (Deut. 28:59, Isa. 14:6). *A sword passed through his land* (Ez. 14:17) and the [enemy] besieged the city and took it with a show of strength. *They entered the city, every man heading straight to take its spoil and seize its booty* (Josh. 6:20, Isa. 10:6), and *men, oppressed by guilt blood*, came *from the battle* (Num. 31:14, Prov. 28:17) even to his home. *Their swords were sharpened for slaughter* (Ez. 21:20) and they took all his wealth and possessions by force, *taking even the bed from under him and stripping him of his tunic* (Prov. 22:27, Gen. 37:23). His *beloved and cherished* children (1 Sam. 1:23), *their appearance like sapphire* (Lam. 4:7), were *carried off in fish baskets* (Amos 4:2) to another land, *sold there as slaves and maidservants* (Esth. 7:4) *and ruled over by their oppres-*

16. The meaning of the Hebrew is uncertain.

17. The name Ahituv appears in Scripture, but it is employed here as another fictive device. The name—which invokes brotherhood (*aḥi*) and goodness (*tuv*)—was used to represent those who comprehend God's goodness in the world.

sors (Isa. 14:2). His wife, *a loving doe* and woman of grace, *wallowed in her blood* at his feet (Prov. 5:19, Ez. 16:6). Not wanting to abrogate the covenant she had made with him in her youth, *she preferred strangulation, death to her wasted frame* (Job 7:15). *All this came upon him, and still, he maintains his integrity* (Ps. 44:18, Job 2:3). He says: "*My portion has fallen delightfully* (Ps. 16:6) and *I greatly rejoice in the Eternal* (Isa. 61:10); *these blows are the blows of one who loves me* (Zech. 13:6) [stemming] from His desire to be generous with me *to renew my youth like that of an eagle* (Ps. 103:5) or to save me from far worse evils in the *pit of destruction* (Isa. 38:17)." He can be properly called one who trusts in God, and regarding him the prophets of Israel prophesied: *Happy is he who trusts in the Eternal* (Prov. 16:20).

And lest you say to yourselves that *this man's heart is cast as hard as stone* (Job 41:16) so that he would not complain [even] at the loss of his friends, and that *his flesh is so hardened* (Job 6:12) that he would not weaken *to encourage the one who pounds the anvil* (Isa. 41:7). *Do not allow your mouths to bring you to sin* (Ecc. 5:5) against this man, *for who feels* these wounds *but he* (Ecc. 2:25). From the time *he sat on his mother's knees* (Job 3:12) until the time that God's hand fell upon him, *his foot was so tender and dainty that he never ventured to set it on the ground* (Deut. 28:56). *He showed pity and compassion* (rev. Ez. 7:4) to the members of his household *and provided for all those who were weak* (2 Chron. 28:15); *whoever touched them touched the pupil of his eye* (Zech. 2:12). How, in one moment, could *he turn into a cruel individual* (Job 30:21), *shutting his eyes from seeing and his ears from hearing* their outcry (Isa. 33:15, 59:1)? By God! *The sound of their wailing penetrated his inmost parts* (Zech. 11:3, Prov. 18:8), and *out of his love and pity* for them (Isa. 63:9), he would *offer himself as ransom* for them (Ex. 30:12), if this is what his adversaries desired.

Rather, from his youth he was nourished by Torah and wisdom and understood books and *good sense* (Neh. 8:8). He probed and understood that *the Lord is gracious and merciful* (Ps. 111:4), bestowing His goodness on all living things *in accordance with* their *ability* (Lev. 14:22) to receive its abundance. For that which perfects us and our circumstances should be considered good, and conversely, what is referred to as evil is something that is a deficiency in ourselves and our circumstances.[18] We should know that God *cares for the work of His hands* (Job 14:15), for as the Psalmist stated, *the Eternal takes pleasure in His works* (Ps. 104:31),

18. Mendelssohn introduced Wolffian ideas as dictates of sound reason. Despite the Candide-like loss of family and possessions, Ahituv is rendered more spiritually perfect through his deepened trust in God. That increased perfection coincides with Wolff's definition of good and evil: "Whatever makes us and our condition more perfect is good; whatever makes us and our condition less perfect is evil." See Wolff, *Vernünftige*, par. # 426. In the same spirit, Wolff justifies adversity as a divine dispensation and a means to improve our well-being: "He [God] uses it as a means to beneficial ends" (par. # 1060), and "God [allows] adversity [to come] as a means to promote our welfare" (par. # 1064).

and from the joy comes love; and [we should know] that God's knowledge encompasses every accident *and chance that happens to all* things (Ecc. 9:11). As such, one who ascribes miserliness to God—that He would be loath to grant His beloved creatures *their sufficient needs* (Deut. 15:8)—besmirches Him.

After telling you all this, know *that God loves kindness* to benefit His creatures (Mic. 7:18). How can we delude ourselves *to defy the Lord of Hosts* (1 Sam. 17:45) to think evil thoughts *to make Him our enemy* (Isa. 63:10)? *It must be evil thoughts* (Neh. 2:2). Instead, *we should put our confidence in Him* (Ps. 78:7), *for He afflicted and He will heal, He wounded and He will swathe us* (Hos. 6:1). The evils will be the cause and means of bringing us the good.

And as to men saying "*Is his arm, then, unable to rescue* and not cause us pain (Ecc. 3:18, Isa. 50:2)," *say to them thus* (Jer. 10:11): Should he *dislodge rocks from their place* on your behalf (Job 18:4)? *Who has stood in the council of God* (Jer. 23:18) and will reveal what is good for us? Are not *actions measured by the Eternal* alone (1 Sam. 2:3)? *For He knows the way we take* (Job 23:10) [and] that which He will bestow upon us at the end of our days.

Many statements of our Sages support these ideas, and in my haste, the following are the ones that I saw fit to write down. One statement is in [the Talmud] Bava Qamma 38a. "The daughter of Rabbi Samuel b. Judah died, [and the rabbis said to Ulla: 'Let us go to console him']. Ulla responded to them: 'I will have nothing to do with the consolation offered by Babylonians—it is blasphemous, since [in consolation] one says "what can one do?" but if something could have been done, it would have been done.'" Ulla understood that they would think that the evil inflicted upon us by God was an absolute evil, and *then this would be their consolation: who can contend with He who is stronger than himself* (Job 6:10, Ecc. 6:10)? In his eyes, the words of those offering consolation were inappropriate and he considered them a blasphemy against the goodness of God. Ulla then went by himself *to console and comfort him* (Job 2:11) and ended his words by saying:[19] "If our teacher's [i.e., R. Samuel's] daughter was worthy of producing good offspring, she would surely have lived." Ulla was explaining that God knows *the children who will follow after* his daughter (Deut. 29:21)—that *they will anger the Eternal and turn aside to shamefulness* (Num. 16:30, Hos. 9:10) and would be an everlasting disgrace for R. Samuel. Therefore God ended her life, since death with honor is preferable to life with disgrace. The reason for her death was to save her and the house of her father from a worse fate.

I will also direct you to an even more striking passage in the Midrash: "*God looked over all He had made, and found it very good* (Gen. 1:31)—this is death."[20]

19. Mendelssohn omitted a few lines to cite the conclusion of Ulla's remarks.

20. The midrashic passage appears in a number of texts with slight variation; the wording here is attested in Yal. Sh. [Psalms] § 643 and the *Zohar*; cf. the *Be'ur* to Gen. 1:31 below, pp. 303–6.

Our Sages, who have a legacy of wisdom, taught that it is only due to our deficient understanding that we consider death the most bitter of evils. In truth, *it is a gift of God* (Ecc. 3:13) *that it may be well with us* (Deut. 6:24).

°(The rest of the letter sent by my friend is in my possession, and I will publish it shortly.)

Section Three

A PERSON IS OBLIGATED TO ACCEPT THE BAD JUST AS HE ACCEPTS THE GOOD[1]

The *hardships that befall* mankind (Ex. 18:8) can be *divided into four principal* kinds (Gen. 2:10). (1) Those consequent to nature that happen to us *since we too are simply flesh*, *nipped from clay* (Gen. 6:3, Job 33:6) and subject to generation and degeneration.[2] (2) Those whose roots lie in our choice of moral vices; were it not for *the unwise thing that we did* (Gen. 31:28) and *for confusing bad for good, or good for bad* (Lev. 27:10), these evils would not afflict us. (3) A third type are those evils that affect a man of God, *blameless and upright and shunning evil* (Job 1:1), when he is harassed by rebellious men who *ambush him for his blood* (Prov. 1:18). (4) No less than these are unavoidable matters of *strife and contention* (Isa. 58:4), for those around us have different opinions, *one says thus and another says thus* (1 Kgs. 22:20), all due to differing temperaments and moral qualities.

One of the divine precepts incumbent upon us is that *we bend our shoulder to bear* (Gen. 49:15) the yoke of misfortunes that come to pass and [wait] *silently for His salvation* (Lam. 3:26). And if one complains about the evil that has befallen him, his complaint is really against God and His providence. Aside from the fact that this is a sin and highly rebellious, would it not be *good and proper for a man to bear the yoke* (Ps. 133:1, Lam. 3:27) that was placed upon him rather than *to sin with his lips* (Job 2:10)? It would make the burden [of misfortunes] lighter upon us and not too heavy to bear. The bitterness of *the cup of wrath* (Isa. 51:17) will be sweetened and *we will not be wearied with our lives* (Gen. 27:46).

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1. M. Ber. 9:5. A more literal translation would read: "A person is obligated to bless the bad just as he blesses the good," but it is translated here in the sense in which it is understood in Ber. 60b and in Mendelssohn's discussion that follows.

2. See *Guide* III:12: "The first type of evil is that which befalls man because of the nature of generation and decay. . . . because of his being endowed with matter."

Turn away from a broken and pained *man* (Num. 16:26) afflicted by his illness, the *bad and unremitting disease and mortal agony* (Deut. 28:59, Isa. 17:11) that is called "falling sickness."[3] *Would* [God] only *hasten to his aid* (Ps. 38:23). [The afflicted] *will additionally flog* his flesh *in excess*, *tear hair from his head* (Deut. 25:3, Ezra 9:3); *he will mar his appearance* [to be] *unlike that of man* (Isa. 52:14), *making cuttings in his flesh* (Lev. 21:5). See how he *adds grief* to his grief, *calamity to calamity*, *disaster to his disaster* (Jer. 45:3, 4:20, Ez. 7:26) [and] *his sighs were many* (Lam. 1:22); he added to his own anguish. Perhaps he would have found relief and a remedy for his illness; but now *his blood is on his head* (Josh. 2:19). *His hands have shed his* [own] *blood* (rev. Deut. 21:7) or have *brought near his end* (Lam. 4:18).

The natural hardships are those immutably affixed by the Eternal God, which will not be removed by human endeavor and *their comings and goings* (Ez. 43:11). If your complaints are with regard to these, *let us clarify the matter* (Isa. 1:18)! Lest your own mouth not admit that they are small in number—stand and bear witness against me! Why will you speak against my God? Why *have you gone through all this trouble* (2 Kgs. 4:13)? You bear witness to the weakness of *those who suckle at the breast and the pain of their birth* (Joel 2:16, Gen. 3:16); the grief for the death of *men who were my friends* (Jer. 38:22); and *my strength that fails me in my hoary old age* (Ps. 38:11, 71:18); *my vigor that was destroyed* (Dan. 10:8); and this death that will *torment me* (Judg. 11:35). For the other *evils that befall you* (Deut. 31:17) in your lifetime are either [due to] the loss of the vanities of imaginary possessions;[4] or they are of the kind that reached you due to your foolishness and evil deeds—*this is what you have done* to yourself (Mal. 1:9). This is also true of *all the dire plagues* that cause you pain (Deut. 7:15)—*you have* mainly *diminished your own strength* (Ps. 31:11) by also acting foolishly and not paying attention to keep *your feet from slipping* (Ps. 56:14). Or perhaps *your arrogant heart has seduced you to swell your bones* (Obad. 1:3, Prov. 15:30); you went after the vain *luxuries of commoners*, and these *only for gain* (Ecc. 2:8, Prov. 21:5). *They wore away your flesh and skin; they shattered your bones* (Lam. 3:4).

I have observed and reflected (Ecc. 8:9) that from all the hardships *whose names you have mentioned* (Ps. 16:4) there is none as *bad and bitter* (Jer. 2:19) as our death and that of *our comrades* (Obad. 1:7). For these *entangle and weight upon us* (Lam. 1:14) *and even the most stout-hearted of warriors will break down under their burden* (Amos 2:16, Ex. 23:5). It is surely easier for us to bear the weight of other evils that you mention, and even *a hollow man should not be dismayed by their noise* (Job 11:12, Isa. 31:4).

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3. *ḥoli ha-nofel*, i.e., epilepsy.

4. *ʿazivat hevle ha-qinyanim ha-medummim*. Mendelssohn has in mind Maimonides' statement in *Guide* III:54, wherein he speaks of the pleasure taken in the perfection of material possessions—the lowest of the perfections—as "purely imaginary." In our context, Mendelssohn is noting that people regard the loss of material possessions as an evil, although in truth such possessions are not real or essential.

It has been many years, and I have forgotten the *hardships that befell me* (Ex. 18:8) when I was young and had my mother's kind-heartedness. *No matter* (2 Sam. 18:22): why should I continue to speak about children's matters? *They lack discernment* (Deut. 32:28) and do not act with wisdom. *What use is it, what do we benefit in searching the provisions-sack* (Ps. 120:3, Gen. 44:12) of endurance, if a person bears his yoke *before he learns to call his father and mother* (Isa. 8:4)? *Who will give a young child knowledge and foresight* (Prov. 1:4)? Desire alone rules him and soothes all his activities, from the least to the greatest.

No, A. . . . the hyena alone raised its hand to smite its wet nurse while still at the breast. However, *he and none like him* (Isa. 48:8) truly regretted that deed; *and he shall confess to that which he sinned* (Lev. 5:5). *Only the simple will enter here* to do *as the fool with his nonsense* (Prov. 9:4, 17:12).

The pangs and throes of a woman sitting on the birth stool *are beyond me* (Prov. 30:18, Isa. 13:8). I will never know how heavily the pain weighs upon her. But I would suggest that it is not too heavy to bear, for I have seen widows, *forlorn and forsaken* (Isa. 54:6),[5] *remove their widow's garb and marry another man* (Gen. 38:14, Deut. 29:7). Or *beasts of the field and wild beasts born to their kind* (Joel 2:22, Gen. 1:24, Num. 1:18); *there is none to disturb it with all this trouble* (Lev. 26:6, 2 Kgs. 4:13).

I reflected upon a man of hoary old age, and I have not found all these evils of which you spoke. For as his strength diminishes and weakness prevails over him, so *desire droops* (Ecc. 12:5) and he will no longer continue to feel his pains. His life will otherwise *be pleasing to him* (Ps. 104:34) when he sees that *he has lived long on the earth* (Deut. 4:40), even against the *diseases that the Eternal has inflicted upon him* (Deut. 29:21). A person *satisfied of life* (Gen. 35:29) will not sigh except in facing death, and the sound of death that knocks at his door terrifies him more than a younger man. However, if I have lost a beloved friend or brother, a father or son or *my wife in my arms* (Deut. 13:7), *I am distressed by what has happened* (Ecc. 2:17). *The hand of the Eternal was against me* (Deut. 2:15) and wounded my heart; *the soft and sensual* in me (Deut. 28:56) was severed. Were I incapable of being *courageous and brave* (Deut. 31:6) in the face of this misfortune, it would almost be too heavy to bear.

Although *healing will come to the bruises and welts* of a strong body *and its power remains undiminished* (Neh. 4:1, Isa. 1:6, Ps. 73:4), there is no cure if the disease affects a downtrodden and suffering body. This is true also with regard to psychological wounds. A strong individual *has self-control* (Prov. 16:32); he will be steadfast and *proudly raise his head* (Ps. 110:7) in the face of these troubles. *Seven times the righteous man falls and gets up* (Prov. 24:16). *Like a reed that sways in water to and fro* (1 Kgs. 14:15, 2:42), it will bend its head in the face of *the storm*

5. The context and scriptural allusion suggest that the text should read *ʿazuvah ve-ʿaṣuvah* rather than *ʿazuvah ve-ʿaṣurah*.

and the tempest until it passes (Ps. 55:9). *The waves and floods all fall about her* (Ps. 42:8) and afterward she rises and *stands upright like a wall* (Ex. 15:8). Not so *those devoid of sense* (Prov. 9:4), for they have reeled like *chaff dispersed by the wind* (Isa. 17:13). *They scoffed malevolently* at that which has befallen them—*they shall fall and rise no more* (Ps. 73:8, Isa. 24:20).

What shall a man complain about (Lam. 3:39) and what will he protest with regard to God because He has taken *the wife of your bosom* (Deut. 13:7); and you, when you *gave your love to her* (Song 7:13), did you not know that she would surely die? God gave you *the light of your eyes, and God has taken away* (Ez. 24:16). *Lift up your hands to him and praise the Eternal for His goodness* (Lam. 2:19, Ps. 107:8) for the days that *He granted you your heart's desire* (Ps. 21:3). She was on loan to you from the Eternal your God, and now *her days have ended* (2 Sam. 7:12); *the creditor is coming to collect*; why *does it vex you to pay your debt* (2 Kgs. 4:1, 4:7, Deut. 15:10)?

Your heart moans (Jer. 48:36): *who foretold from the start that her end is near* (Isa. 41:26, Lam. 4:18)? Who believed that she would be taken from me in so short a time?

Why didn't you believe it? *Who foretold from the start* (Isa. 41:26) that you would have many days *without injury and without wailing* (Ps. 144:14)? Go and consider all the good *that the Eternal your God has wrought for you all along until this day* (Isa. 63:7, Num. 22:30) as against this evil. *Survey the course of your ways* (Prov. 4:26), the good and the bad that you have done, and afterward *bring charges* (Jer. 4:12) against the Eternal your God.

If, conversely, *the Lord has fulfilled your wishes* (Ps. 20:6), and *you went down with those who go down to the grave* (Ez. 26:20) while she lives on, have your complaints been removed? What more do you have to wail about? Beyond either of these two possibilities,[6] what will you seek? For if you asked the Eternal your God *to take both your lives on the same day* (Gen. 27:45)—by God, *you have not asked for this wisely* (Ecc. 7:10).

NOTE[7]

It is known that **?** is a mark indicating a question and a matter or doubt; **!** [indicates] astonishment, declaration, and exclamation; a period serves to end

6. That is, either surviving or predeceasing your spouse.

7. This marked the end of the first number of *Qohelet Musar*, and Mendelssohn saw fit to explain the punctuation marks that appeared here. Western-style punctuation developed in late-medieval Latin manuscripts and was systematized and popularized in the first centuries of printing. In printed Hebrew texts, question marks were first introduced in Abraham Portaleone's *Shilṭe ha-Gibborim* (Mantua, 1612), and a half-century later Isaac Abarbanel's *Perush ʿal Nevi'im Ri'shonim* (Leipzig, 1686) included the exclamation mark. There was increased use of the midline *punctus* and the *virgule* to serve the function of a comma, but there remained variation in the marking of pauses and the end of phrases and sentences.

a statement in place of the *sof pasuq*; and two periods[8] comes in place of an *etnaḥta'*.[9] We have found [markings] of this sort in the Amsterdam edition of Maimonides' *Mishneh Torah*[10] and Abarbanel's commentary on the Torah.[11]

8. That is, a colon, which functioned here more like a semicolon or comma.

9. *sof pasuq* and *etnaḥta* are terms for masoretic *ṭe'amim*, representing the two markings of greatest pausal and disjunctive value. Mendelssohn was simply reaching for a scriptural referent familiar to his readers, but he was also implicitly drawing attention to the utility of the fully formed system of punctuation already available to Jews, a theme to which he would return in his later exegetical writings.

10. This edition was published by Immanuel Athias in 1702 and generally hailed for its elegance and clarity. Although the three-page Portuguese dedication by Athias was well punctuated with modern markings, the body of the multi-volume Hebrew work, which incorporated Maimonides' code and a handful of commentaries, contained none of the punctuation to which Mendelssohn refers. This was also true of the other printed editions of the *Mishneh Torah* that appeared before the mid-eighteenth century. Mendelssohn's reference is thus in need of further clarification.

11. Mendelssohn was seemingly referring to Isaac Abarbanel, *Perush ha-Torah* (Hanau, 1710), published by the Christian Hebraist Heinrich Jakob van Bashuysen. It made ample use of question marks and the *virgule* for the equivalent of a comma, but otherwise it contained less punctuation than Abarbanel's *Perush 'al Nevi'im Ri'shonim* (see n. 7 above). Mendelssohn may well have been referring to that earlier work.

Section Four

Yesterday when I came home to my work (Ps. 90:4, Gen. 39:11) I found this letter on my doorstep, and now I will set it before you. *He has pronounced his own verdict* (1 Kgs. 20:40). Had he not kept his name from me, I would already have responded to him, as *your eyes will behold* (Ps. 17:2).

HERE IS THE TEXT OF THE LETTER:

Greetings to you, the *rod of discipline* (Prov. 22:15).[1]

How is it, my brother, that you have gone out today *to reprove your kinsman* (Lev. 19:17)? Won't *everyone who hears laugh at you* (Gen. 21:6)! Are we lacking admonishers? Those who go *around from town to town, province to province* (Ez. 40:5, 2 Chron. 30:10, Esth. 9:28), *shrieking bitterly* "*Turn back, rebellious children*" (Zeph. 1:14, Jer. 3:14)! We heard all this, but *we do not accept* [your] *discipline* (Jer. 2:30). *How did the spirit come to deceive you* (2 Chron. 18:23 and 2 Sam. 3:25) that we should listen to your dreams and words? You wrote:[2] "And you,[3] if you will read these words; get up and go to *the palace garden* (Esth. 7:7)." *The mouth of the devout utters wisdom* (Ps. 37:30)! I will not disobey you. I too *will betake myself* toward evening *to the mount of myrrh and to the hill of frankincense* (Song 4:6). *You are a divine prince among us! I will not stop you from doing your*

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1. *shevet musar*. This greeting was doubly sarcastic, playing off of the fact that *musar* meant both "discipline" and "morality." It portrayed the author of *Qohelet Musar* as stern and abstemious, while also identifying him with the old-worldly piety of a moralistic tract called *Shevet Musar* (Constantinople, 1712).

2. The reference is to section 1 of *Qohelet Musar*.

3. In the original passage in section 1 the text reads *ve-'atah*, "and you," while here it has *ve-'atah*, "and now." Both readings are plausible, but given that it is a citation, we have rendered it as it appeared earlier.

bidding (Gen. 23:6, 1 Sam. 22:14). *But may my lord*[4] *pardon your servant's iniquity in this*: *there will be no glory for me* to be like you (2 Kgs. 5:18, Judg. 4:9). *I will not graze in the gardens parched with thirst* (Song 6:2, Isa. 5:13); *and I will not play over* an ant's *hole* (rev. Isa. 11:8) in order to search profoundly for the origins of things. This, however, has long been my way: *before the shadows of evening grow long* (Jer. 6:4), *a group of my friends* (Gen. 26:26)[5] gathered *to the place that we had chosen* (Deut. 12:5)[6] the day before yesterday. And since we had long surveyed all the trees of the garden and their blossoms, no one among us *turned aside to see this sight* (Ex. 3:3)[7] that he has seen *time and again* (Gen. 31:7). *Let us certainly go up* (Num. 14:30) each man straightaway, to the place where the wine is to be found. *And what merriment would there be* without *wine* that *cheers the hearts of men* (Ecc. 2:2, Ps. 104:15)? Then *we will try you with merriment* (Ecc. 2:1) until *our bellies are filled like a steaming water-skin* (Job 20:23, 41:12); *we will not be able to stop* (Jer. 36:5). *We will dig with force and run with vigor* (Job 39:21), *we will yell and roar aloud* (Isa. 42:13); *the earth will be split open by our uproar* (1 Kgs. 1:40). *It is not the exclamation-cry of victors, nor that of the vanquished* (Ex. 32:18), *but the loud sounds of gaiety and being merry with wine* (Jer. 8:16, Esth. 1:10) to know *that they drank and became intoxicated* (Song 5:1).

A month ago I was sitting among my friends, happy and content, and *the seat* of A., the chief of *wine guzzlers, was vacant* (1 Sam. 20:18, Prov. 23:20). A moment later he ran toward us, *his mouth filled with laughter* (Ps. 126:2) and in his hand *a fluttering scroll inscribed on both sides* (Zech. 5:1, Ex. 32:15).[8] He laughed and said: "*It is not for you to drink wine* (Prov. 31:4)! *Take instruction you silly people* (Ps. 2:10, 94:8), stand by *and I will show you the path that you should follow* (Jer. 42:3)." *Then he loudly read* (2 Kgs. 18:28) the letter that you had written, and D. spoke up *saying* "*Then the matter is known* (Ex. 2:14)! I saw the [author] and *he looked ill-tempered* for several days (Dan. 1:10). It must be that these matters were *shut up inside of him* (Jer. 20:9)." *The doorposts shook from the sound of the laughter* coming out of *our mouths* (Isa. 6:4, Ps. 126:2).

And now, if not for the darkened look *masking your face* (Ex. 34:35, Isa. 25:7), you would know *that he labored in vain* (Isa. 49:4). Even if *you call out on bustling*

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4. The satirical intent of this fictive letter was readily apparent in the textual substitution here, replacing the scriptural Tetragrammaton with the profane "my lord" and thereby mocking the pious and solemn tone set by these texts.

5. *aḥuzzat mereʿehu*; Mendelssohn interpreted the words per Onqelos and Rashi, and later translated them accordingly.

6. The text contains a witty irreverence, since the biblical phrase elicited here, *el ha-maqom asher yivḥar* ("to the place that [God] will choose") invoked God's designation of a sanctuary for worship.

7. The irreverence is again manifest in the use of this biblical phrase, which in its original context describes Moses' turn toward the wondrous sight of the burning bush.

8. Note again the irreverent satire. In this one phrase, the author of *Qohelet Musar* is alternately identified with Zechariah's prophetic rebuke and with the two tablets borne by Moses.

roads and raise your voice at every corner (Prov. 1:21, 2:3, 7:12), "*If only you would listen to me* (Gen. 23:13)"; place *a muzzle on your mouth* and do not *be put to shame* (Ps. 39:2, Gen. 38:23).

I know your obstinacy (Deut. 31:27); *you won't listen to my words* (rev. Ps. 103:20). Perhaps *your arrogant heart has seduced you* (Obad. 1:3) to write things in order to publish them in the *Qohelet* [*Musar*], for such is the way of pamphlet writers. But it is not this that saddens me. These words *are not of my own heart's accord* (Num. 16:28) but from a gathering of all my friends who follow my way, so that you should know that *you have become a laughingstock to us, the butt of our jibes all day* (Lam. 3:14). *Peace unto you* (1 Sam. 25:6).

RESPONSE

To my brother! We did not set out *to seize the corners of the earth to shake the wicked from it* (rev. Job 38:13). Doesn't everyone realize *that they are too heavy for us, like a huge burden* (Ps. 38:5)? It was not for *the money placed in our rucksacks* (Gen. 43:12) *that we are in full cry after you* saying "*turn away, turn away* from your wicked ways (Jer. 12:6, Isa. 52:11)." For it will *dull the nation's heart and block its ears* (Isa. 6:10) when it sees that it is money that puts words into the mouth of *one who speaks righteously* (Isa. 63:1): as when *he wraps his mantle around his face, raising his voice like a trumpet* (1 Kgs. 19:13, Isa. 58:1) and saying "*How long will you fools love* ill-begotten gains (Prov. 1:22)!"—and then, when he is done speaking, says "*Pay me my wages*" (Zech. 11:12).

Please *understand plainly*, that *I imagine myself to be like you* (1 Sam. 24:12, Ps. 50:21). You have given your heart *to wander after your eyes* (Num. 15:39) and to stray after all *the luxuries of commoners* (Ecc. 2:8). You have gathered Jewish youth around yourself *to teach them what to do* (Ex. 4:15, 18:20), *guiding them like riverbanks wherever you wish* (Job 6:15 and Prov. 21:1). *I am not less than you* (Job 12:3). I have also *put joy into my heart* (Ps. 4:8) since I became a man. *In the evening I lay down* happy, *and in the morning there is joy* (Ps. 30:6). *I call to my friends and I let them drink of the spiced wine of my pomegranate juice* (Lam. 1:19, Song 8:2). *We go early to the vineyards, stay late in the villages* (Song 7:12–13). *Then our inclinations testify against us* (Isa. 3:9); that merriment *entered our innermost like water, and like salve in our limbs* (Ps. 109:18). None of us, however, *have repudiated his intellect like a drunkard* (Ps. 34:1, Jer. 23:9) *galloping like a steed, raising his voice* to his acquaintances (Nah. 3:2, Job 37:4) and responding to those who greet him with a "Hurrah!" *A devout man rejoices* not with noise or sound, *but with brothers dwelling together in green pastures by still waters* (Ps. 58:11, 133:1, 23:2). The Sharon and the Carmel, the Plain and the Bashan; *the heights of heaven and the furthest parts of the earth* (Job 11:8, Isa. 8:9) *will make all their goodness pass before them* (Ex. 33:19). And the trees will all *proclaim praise of the Eternal* (Ps. 78:4); on the right, *rams and sheep will prance* upon pastures, on

the left, *the birds of the sky will sing under the foliage* (Ps. 114:4, 104:12). *Tamed and wild beasts and creatures that creep will be glad to reach their pasture* (Ps. 148:10, Job 3:22, 1 Chron. 4:40). They will answer and say: "See that the hand of God created us and *provides our food* (Job 38:41)."

Sweet was our cultivated camaraderie (Ps. 55:15) with every man stirring the other saying: "*Let us be strong and resolute* (1 Chron. 19:13)." See that *God's goodness remains for all eternity* upon *the creatures that crawl upon the earth* (Ps. 103:17, Gen. 1:26), and all the more so upon mankind, the chosen of all creatures and the purpose of their existence. God drew *upon him a spirit from on high* (Isa. 32:15) *and set him highest above all* living things (Deut. 26:19). *How great is His felicity that He secures* for humankind (Ps. 31:20)! *One who is wise will note this* [and] *join in our jubilation* (Ps. 107:43, Isa. 66:10). He will contemplate the *ultimate beauty* (Ps. 50:2) of the order of creation, and his own distinguished place in its scale of gradations.[9] *He will look below* (Isa. 5:30) and marvel at the multitude of gradations that lay below his feet *descending ever lower* (Deut. 28:43); man, ape, and reptile; eagle, dove, and white owl; cedar, hyssop, and stones of the field. He will look up to the heavens, astonished at the plethora of creatures standing above him—*they are uncountable* (Ps. 40:6)! Tell me if you know of a joy greater than the joy of this contemplation.

Let me set it before you! *I will rejoice only in my Lord* (Ps. 104:34) because he has distinguished me among living beings and placed me on a rung midway between nothingness and angels.[10] *You rejoiced over all sorts of treasures* (Ps. 119:14), for you have gone down from the height of your station and *are like the beasts* (Ps. 49:13). *For if a man gets drunk and exposes his nakedness, he has no superiority over the beast* (Lam. 4:21, Ecc. 3:19). *Neither by might nor by power will* man *be exalted and raised* above the living things on earth, *but by the spirit of the Lord of Hosts* (Zech. 4:6, Isa. 52:13).

If only you had tasted *but one portion* (Num. 23:13) of the nectar of this delight. For now *you have no rest and no quiet* (Job 3:26) until you choose Him over all human desires. *I chastise you not for your* urges; for I know that *this is the Lord's doing* (Ps. 50:8, 118:23) in order that you discern the sweetness of true pleasure and disdain the wormwood of lesser urges. And you—when you chose evil over good, you did not do so because of your evil nature, since your heart sought goodness. Rather, your knowledge was defective, *your counsel folly*

9. The phrase employed here, *sullam ha-maʿalot*, would appear to refer to the classical notion of the great chain of being. See the following note.

10. This sentence was adapted from Edward Young's *The Complaint: or, Night-thoughts on Life, Death, and Immortality* (1742–46), lines 73–74, in which the English poet spoke of man as the "Distinguished link in being's endless chain/Midway from nothing to the deity." Mendelssohn returned to Young's poem in section 6 below. Credit for this reference belongs to Lawrence Kaplan and James LaForest.

(Isa. 19:11).[11] You thwarted the ways of discernment *by taking the slag and separating the dross from the silver* (Isa. 1:25, Prov. 25:4).

Consider that from the perfection of all things comes the pleasure that man experiences with regard to it, and if there is no perfection, there is no pleasure.[12]

When people notice an *exquisite object* (Isa. 2:16), what makes their perception so pleasing, and why do they declare it to be so *lovely to view* (Gen. 2:9)? This is only because of the perfection of the form and its realization, as well as the shifting of different colors and the subtlety of shading of the illustrated object, for this, and nothing else, is its perfect beauty.

Why would *a wise man* rejoice *in his wisdom, a strong man in his strength, and a rich man in his riches* (Jer. 9:22)? Is it not because he considers it valuable and a perfection of his being?

If a man looks upon royal palaces and their courtyards and the configuration of their *rows of hewn stone* (1 Kgs. 6:36); the ways in which stones are arrayed upon stones and the magnificence of the windows; the corners of the doorways of their houses and their dimensions; and the relation of the lowest floor to the upper one; then *joy will enter his heart* (Ps. 4:8) *for he will know and understand* (rev. Isa. 44:18) the science of architecture and the *splendid beauty* (Isa. 28:1) of the building and its design, because this is its perfection and its perfect beauty.

Indeed, if the perfection of the matter and its purpose *is hidden from a person* (1 Sam. 3:17), he will not derive joy from it, *selah*.[13]

Let my words be tested (Gen. 42:16)! If an ignorant man who had no experience judging works of visual art were to enter a nobleman's *mosaic-covered chambers* (Ez. 8:12), or if a man who does not understand the methods of architecture will look upon the house of *the king's sanctuary* (Amos 7:13), his eyes will grow weary of their delight and he will be astonished at those who rejoice in its magnificence.

I know that at times a person enjoys himself with regard to something lacking all perfection, due to his deficiency in understanding. *The arrogance of his heart* (Deut. 29:18) leads him astray to exchange the valuable for the worthless. Since it appears in his eyes to be perfect, *he rejoices heartily when he sees it* (Ex. 4:14); but his joy will neither be enduring nor sure because *its foundation will be sunk* on false perfections and vain thoughts (Job 38:6).

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11. A key to Wolff's optimism was that evil resulted from a lack of knowledge rather than innate evil or character; see Wolff, *Vernünftige*, par. # 1056.

12. The Wolffian idea of perfection informs this letter. Perfection characterizes God's creation, e.g., the beauty and order of the universe, including the great chain of being with its continuous gradations from the lowest to the highest. God, naturally, is the most perfect spirit. Our pleasure in apprehending creation is a product of that perfection. See Wolff, *Vernünftige*, par. # 702–19, 904, 964, 1083.

13. This mimicked the biblical style of verse endings in Psalms; see above, section 2, n. 15.

If a man's *spirit shall be drained* (Isa. 19:3) so that he takes pleasure in abominable things and rejoices in wickedness, thinking that it is good—is this what you call enjoyment? To me, it is like a *consuming fever* (Deut. 32:24), like those who lie on their beds and in their midst *burns a blaze like a fire inflamed* (Isa. 10:16). They will rejoice because *they got what they desired* (Ps. 78:29), *not knowing that their lives are at stake* (Prov. 7:23).

Not so with the joy born from the lap of true perfection—its steadfastness will endure forever. The *strong bond* (2 Sam. 15:12) of perfection, and the pleasure of one who perceives it, will not be severed; *the same fate* will extend to both (Ecc. 2:14).

Hear it and know (Job 5:27). If a man rejoices in the perfection of his friend, his *wishes will be for him* (Gen. 4:7). *He will not stir out of his tent* morning and evening, and if he is kept away from him *he will have neither quiet nor repose until he finds the one his soul loves* (Job 3:26, Song 3:4). *And if he has the ability to do him* good (Gen. 31:29) he will do so, *as if fulfilling a child's simple needs* (Ps. 131:2). Thus was the love of David and Jonathan, which the Sages called unconditional love;[14] for the individual *soul was bound up with his* friend's (Gen. 44:30) with regard to the true perfection and the unequalled excellence that he found in him, and not with an expectation for something else with which he could fulfill his desire. And so, their love would be interminable, and they too could say "*death* [alone] *will come between us*" (Ruth 1:17).

How great was the yearning of the wise for the source of the perfections and the purpose of them all? How shall the joy of discerning God's deeds and the work of His hands be weighed? Is there anything perfect other than Him? Is there anything that can be compared to His creations? Then, from the strength of his yearning, *he will fling away the idols of silver* to those devoid of sense (Isa. 2:20). He will rejoice in God and be glad with the little he understood of His perfection. And then it will be good for him, *selah*.

Consider well what is before you (Prov. 23:1), and know that love of God is the joy of knowing His perfection. And from it is born the desire to heed God and to observe His commandments, and this is worship stemming from love. °(I have more to say on the subject of worship stemming from love, and at another time *I will exalt great things with regard to it* [Ps. 87:3].) It is not possible to

14. M. Avot 5:16: "All love that is conditional—when the condition is removed, the love is removed as well; but love that is unconditional will never cease. . . . What is an example of unconditional love? The love of David and Jonathan." Mendelssohn was effectively suggesting that Wolff's view of love coincided with the Mishnah. In Wolff, *Vernünftige*, par. # 449, this German philosopher wrote: "Love consists in the willingness to derive a marked pleasure from the good fortune of another. Therefore we take pleasure in the good fortune of those whom we love." "Good fortune (*Glück*)" is whatever contributes to our perfection. Hence Mendelssohn's definition of love as taking pleasure in another's increased perfection.

be in the presence of God without yearning to do well with Him; and as such, rejoicing in God and loving Him are one and the same.

This is what the Sages stated in [the tractate] *Soṭah*, and these are their words:[15] "Two students stood before Rava. One said to him: 'In my dream they read: *How great is the felicity that You secure for those who fear You* (Ps. 31:20).' The other one said: 'In my dream they read: *Let all who trust in You rejoice* (Ps. 5:12).' He responded to them: 'You are both completely righteous individuals—one from love and one from fear.'" Why did the end of that verse, *and let them be happy in You, those who love Your name* (Ps. 5:12), not appear in his dream? °(See Rashi).[16] Rather, *this is just as I have said* (Gen. 41:28); this pious student was informed by heavenly means that the love of God cannot be separated from rejoicing in God, and from it stems the yearning to serve Him. For the definition of love is rejoicing in the perfection of the object of love along with the yearning to earn its favor; and without joy, there is no love.

But I would lay my case before you (Job 5:8). I hope that you will not continue to mock my admonishments. *Do not spurn* (Lev. 26:11) with words you have measured in order to reprove. And if you desire to place joy in your heart, *I will instruct you and show you the way you should go; this is the resting place and this is the place of repose* (Ps. 32:8, Isa. 28:12). Without this, *of levity I said: "It is mad"* (Ecc. 2:2).

15. Sot. 31a.

16. Mendelssohn, like Rashi on Soṭ. ad loc., seems to have had before him a Talmudic text that quoted only the first part of Ps. 5:12; following Rashi's comment, Mendelssohn noted that the rabbinic point actually rested upon the final phrase of the verse.

Section Six

THE FOLLOWING LETTER REACHED US RECENTLY

How *I yearn to sit with you together* (Ps. 84:3, 133:1)! It has been awhile since *I sat in the company of* my friends (rev. Jer. 15:17); I saw that *your places were vacant and I refused to be comforted* (1 Sam. 20:18, Jer. 31:15). *How good it is* for a man, *and how pleasant to sit* with *his kinsmen* (Ps. 133:1, Obad. 1:7), for *he drinks his fill of love* (Prov. 7:18) and pours into their bosoms all *the heart's searchings* (Judg. 5:16)! Alas, when *I wandered far off and stayed in the outermost parts of the sea* (Ps. 55:8, 139:9), even there *I always set you before my eyes* (Ps. 16:8) and *until I die* (Job 27:5) I will surely remember you. Of all his endeavors, *this is a man's* earthly *reward* (Job 20:29): when the Most High gives him a trusted friend whose *soul is bound up with his own* (Gen. 44:30). And *when the Lord is pleased with his conduct* (Prov. 16:7) the good will increase in tandem with those who rejoice in it; and when distressed, his friends will also *lend their shoulders to carry the burden and make it easier for him* (Gen. 49:15, Ex. 18:22).

I cannot conceal from you (Gen. 47:18), my brothers, that I have seen the beginning of your labors in the first issue of *Qohelet Musar*. Since I found your words to be *straightforward to the intelligent man* (Prov. 8:9), I went to visit my friend, the scholar and physician S., for I know him as one who loves *a skilled tongue and splendid words* (Isa. 50:4, Gen. 49:21). With him were the scholar B. and the enlightened patron H., all of them well read and appreciative of the refinement and splendor of eloquent language, and they were in accord in praising the *sweetness of your speech* (Prov. 16:21). B. spoke up and said that [the editors] were right °(that our language can be employed on all occasions, to give voice to misery and *to sing songs* [Prov. 25:20]).[1] However, *our hands are incapable* (Isa. 50:2) of translating from foreign languages into Hebrew. The master translator, R. Samuel ibn Tibbon, admitted that in translating a piece from Arabic

1. This parenthetical comment was citing from section 2; see above, p. 30.

into Hebrew, the beauty and splendor of its refined language was lost.[2] And if this is true with regard to the languages of the East [from areas] close to the land of Israel such that they were almost the same tongue,[3] what can we do with regard to languages of the west, north and south? Who would not be afraid to approach the task? The ways of the Hebrew tongue[4] and its refined language are far removed from the refined speech of those nations *with the languages of their respective lands* (Gen. 10:20)—who will draw them close so that they be *joined together* (Ez. 37:17)?

I answered and said that the translator that you mention was correct with regard to matters of Torah and philosophy, such as the *Commentary to the Mishnah*,[5] *The Duties of the Heart*, the *Guide*,[6] *The Glory of God*,[7] and *The [Book of] the Apple*;[8] for in [translating] these books, one may not deviate in the slightest from the words of their authors. But then, *the same fate awaits all* languages (Ecc. 2:14); *none of them shall be omitted* (Isa. 34:16).[9] When, however, belles-lettres[10] *are poured from vessel to vessel* (rev. Jer. 48:11) the translator need not preserve anything except the refined language. In this matter, the language of the Hebrews is well established, and there is almost none like it. The *Epistle Concerning Animals*[11] and *The Prince and the Ascetic*[12] will prove my words to be correct. *Be so good as to turn to me* (Job 6:28); we have before us a book written on the Isle of *** °(very far from the lands of the East) words of *lament, moaning, and woe* regarding *the affliction with which the Lord smote* its author

2. The reference was to Judah ibn Tibbon (not his son Samuel) and the preface of his translation of Bahya ibn Paquda, *Ḥovot ha-Levavot*.

3. I.e., Semitic languages.

4. Here and below Mendelssohn used the term *leshon ʿever*.

5. This commentary was notable for being one of the only rabbinic texts dealing centrally with Mishnaic and Talmudic sources to have appeared in Arabic.

6. Bahya ibn Paquda's *The Duties of the Heart* and Maimonides' *Guide*, like almost all Jewish philosophical treatises written before the thirteenth century, were written in Arabic.

7. This was Joseph ben Shem Tov Ibn Shem Tov's fifteenth-century philosophical treatise, which included Hebrew translations of Aristotle's *Ethics*.

8. A pseudo-Aristotelian book, translated from the Arabic into Hebrew in the thirteenth century.

9. The problem of translation, in other words, affected all languages with regard to philosophical writings, and was not a deficiency of Hebrew alone.

10. *imre noʿam*, from Prov. 15:26.

11. *Iggeret Baʿale Ḥayyim* was an early fourteenth-century Hebrew translation of one of the Arabic-language epistles of the Brethren of Purity, an Islamic group that flourished in the tenth and eleventh centuries. Although these epistles contained philosophical ideas drawn from Aristotelian and Neoplatonic traditions, Mendelssohn referred to this treatise as belle-lettristic because of its literary style and form of presentation.

12. *Ben ha-Melekh ve-ha-Nazir* was a Hebrew version of the popular medieval tale known as "Barlaam and Joasaph," which told of a prince who encountered an ascetic and adopted his ways. A Greek (Christian) version appeared in the early medieval period and later an Arabic adaptation. The Hebrew version was translated from the Arabic in the early thirteenth century by Abraham b. Samuel ibn Hasdai.

(Ez. 2:10, Zech. 14:12). Put me to the test! I will pen the beginning of his piece in Hebrew. [See] *whether I will be untrue to all that emerged from his lips* (Job 6:28, Num. 30:13).

To you, men, I have turned my intentions. You will decide if my words are correct; *deliver them to the overseers of the work* (2 Kgs. 22:5). *If not, I will take note and apply my hand again* to amend my errors (Gen. 18:21, Isa. 11:11). *Peace unto you* (1 Sam. 25:6).

[What follows is a Hebrew translation of the first sixty-six lines of Edward Young's *Night Thoughts*.][13]

13. Originally published in 1742–46, this book appeared in its early editions under the full title of *The Complaint: or, Night-thoughts on Life, Death, and Immortality*. This book quickly gained popularity across Europe, and was translated into German in the early 1750s and shortly thereafter into French. Mendelssohn was undoubtedly attracted by the subject matter, but in choosing this piece, he was also trying to show that Jews could cultivate Hebrew in a timely and sophisticated way, no less than what contemporary Europeans were currently doing in their native languages.

II

BE'UR MILLOT HA-HIGGAYON [COMMENTARY ON THE TREATISE ON LOGICAL TERMS]

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EDITORS' INTRODUCTION

Mendelssohn's second Hebrew work, *Be'ur Millot ha-Higgayon*, first appeared in 1761 as a brief commentary on a primer of logic traditionally attributed to Maimonides.[1] In 1765, Mendelssohn published a significantly expanded version of this commentary accompanied by a new introduction, and it is this second edition that served as the standard text for all subsequent reprintings of his commentary.

Although Hebrew translations of Maimonides' Arabic treatise on logic were widely known and studied among the late medieval Jews of Provence, Spain, and Italy,[2] their circulation in early modern Ashkenazic lands was far more limited. Even with its learned and often technical quality, Mendelssohn's commentary helped turn this Maimonidean treatise into a visible and widely published work among eighteenth- and nineteenth-century European Jews. In fact, the work's success says a great deal about Mendelssohn's place in the cultural transformation occurring in eighteenth-century Ashkenazic Jewry. As we have already seen with regard to Mendelssohn's first work, *Qohelet Musar*, Ashkenazic culture had remained impervious to important aspects of the medieval Sephardic cultural heritage. A primary enterprise of the early Haskalah was therefore to recover those texts and areas of knowledge that had long been abandoned, particularly philosophy and biblical exegesis. Mendelssohn was instrumental to the

1. Although *Millot ha-Higgayon* had been attributed to Maimonides for many centuries, Herbert Davidson recently questioned the authorship of this work in "The Authenticity of Works Attributed to Maimonides," in Ezra Fleischer et al., eds., *Me'ah She'arim: Studies in Medieval Jewish Spiritual Life in Memory of Isadore Twersky* (Jerusalem: Magnes, 2001), 118–23; and idem, *Moses Maimonides*: *The Man and His Works* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005), 313–22. Other scholars have rejected Davidson's claim; see Ahmad Hasnawi [Hasnaoui], "Réflexions sur la terminologie logique de Maïmonide et son contexte farabien," in Tony Levy and Roshdi Rashed, eds., *Maimonide: philosophe et savant*, (Leuven: Peeters, 2004), 69–78; Sarah Stroumsa, *Maimonides in His World* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2009), 126–128.

2. See Charles Manekin, "Logic in Medieval Jewish Culture," in Gad Freudenthal, ed., *Science in Medieval Jewish Cultures* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 120.

renewal of Hebrew, and his edition of *Be'ur Millot ha-Higgayon* was a contribution to the rejuvenation of Jewish philosophy.

Mendelssohn saw logic as a basic tool of cultural renewal. He was convinced that the failure to study such subjects impaired the quality of Jewish thought and scholarship, and he aimed to turn *Be'ur Millot ha-Higgayon* into a primer for contemporary yeshivah students and other Jewish cognoscenti. One of Mendelssohn's early tutors in Berlin, Israel Zamosc, had provided a model for such an endeavor in his commentary on *Ruaḥ Ḥen* (1744), a thirteenth-century philosophical and scientific dictionary that served as something of an introduction to Maimonides' *Guide of the Perplexed*. Mendelssohn's early interest and mastery of this subject was clearly shaped by Zamosc's expert guidance.[3]

Introducing Maimonides' treatise on logic to an eighteenth-century audience meant updating its content and bridging the substantive gap between medieval and eighteenth-century philosophy.[4] Mendelssohn endeavored to erect this bridge in a number of ways. To begin with, he provided contemporary equivalents for medieval concepts and language: Maimonides' text was a lexicon of medieval philosophical and logical terms for which Mendelssohn supplied the corresponding German and Latin terminology transliterated in Hebrew characters. Beyond this narrower, more technical aspect of the work, Mendelssohn re-examined medieval philosophical concepts in light of eighteenth-century ones. When Maimonides seemed to invoke the Platonic conception that God had created form from an extant primordial matter, Mendelssohn countered by citing the more traditional Jewish view of the creation of matter *ex nihilo*, but then buttressed this by pointing to the work of "recent scholars" and contemporary arguments regarding the nature of matter.[5] He also used the Maimonidean distinction of essential and accidental properties to introduce the Leibnizian-Wolffian conception of theodicy.[6]

More fundamentally, Mendelssohn re-conceived the nature and role of logic in light of eighteenth-century philosophy: by recasting some basic medieval con-

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3. On Mendelssohn's relationship to Zamosc see Altmann, *Mendelssohn*, 22. On Zamosc, see Gad Freudenthal, "Hebrew Medieval Science in Zamosc ca. 1730: The Early Years of Rabbi Israel ben Moses Halevy of Zamosc," in R. Fontaine, A Schatz, I.E. Zwiep, eds., *Sepharad in Ashkenaz: Medieval Learning and Eighteenth-Century Enlightened Jewish Discourse* (Amsterdam: Koninklijke Nederlandse Akademie, 2007), 25–67.

4. An analysis of *Be'ur Millot ha-Higgayon* in the context of the history of logic lies well beyond the scope of this introduction. Directly or indirectly, Mendelssohn was presumably aware of the early modern critique of Aristotelian logic, especially as it had been preserved by late-medieval scholasticism. The writings of Descartes, the so-called *Port-Royal Logic*, and Wolff's treatise on logic would thus have a bearing on Mendelssohn's choice of terminology and his explications. (Much of Leibniz's writings on logic were not published until well after Mendelssohn's demise.) A full and proper analysis of this aspect of Mendelssohn's work awaits further attention.

5. *JubA*, 14:80 (ch. 9 note k); Mendelssohn's reference to contemporary scholarship included, among others, Wolff, *Vernünftige*, par. # 180.

6. *JubA*, 14:98–99 (ch. 11 note c); see below, pp. 94–95.

cepts he subtly turned Maimonides' discussion of the relationship of language and logic into one about the relationship of language and thought. Maimonides had defined logic using concepts prevalent in medieval Arabic thought that derived from ancient Greek philosophy. He distinguished between "external speech," that is, the formation of discernible sounds that constitute language and manifest themselves in man's bodily or political nature, and "internal speech," namely, the modalities of logic that serve as the stepping-stones for all the natural and divine sciences. These two concepts designated distinct modes of cognition in separate spheres of knowledge.[7] Maimonides, following the tenth-century Arabic philosopher Al-Farabi, understood logic as an instrument for the attainment of knowledge rather than an independent science. He viewed the art of logic as directing the full complement of the soul's rational powers, which applied to the realm of "external speech" as well. Indeed, Maimonides insisted that logic performed this function for all mankind: unlike grammar, which was specific to a particular language, logic was the universal syntax of thought.[8]

Maimonides' understanding of logic was linked to his view of language. He diverged from the "essentialist" view found in the Bible and rabbinic literature that held language, and Hebrew in particular, to be "endowed with intrinsic sanctity."[9] He rejected the notion of language as being "fundamentally related to the ultimate order of things," a view that invested language with significant power, rendering it as an active force in the creation of the world.[10] Instead, Maimonides understood language to be a human invention—or better, convention—that was not an active factor in the construction of the world, but merely an instrument, a means of communication. As such, the precise and articulate use of language was crucial for social and communal advancement. Hence, what logic did for "internal speech," grammar did for "external speech"; both were central to the idea of advancing individuals and societies toward their ultimate perfection.

Mendelssohn recast these issues in distinctly eighteenth-century terms. Under the impact of Descartes' mind-body distinction, Enlightenment philosophers,

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7. The distinction between "internal" and "external" speech pervaded Hellenistic philosophy, in particular the Stoics, Philo, and Plotinus. See Max Mühl, "Der logos endiathetos und prophorikos von der älteren Stoa bis zur Sinode von Smiornum 351," *Archiv für Begriffsgeschichte* 7 (1962), 7–56.

8. See, in addition to the secondary literature listed below, Josef Stern, "Maimonides on Language and the Science of Language," in Robert S. Cohen & Hillel Levine, eds., *Maimonides and the Sciences* (Dordrecht: Kluwer, 2000), 173–226.

9. Isadore Twersky, *Introduction to the Code of Maimonides (Mishneh Torah)* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1980), 324 n. 1.

10. Bernard Septimus, "Maimonides on Language," in Avivah Doron, ed., *The Culture of Spanish Jewry*: *Proceedings of the First International Congress* (Tel Aviv: Levinsky College of Education, 1994), 35–54; the quote is from p. 48. See also Josef Stern, "Language," in Arthur A. Cohen & Paul Mendes-Flohr, eds., *Contemporary Jewish Religious Thought* (New York: Free Press, 1987), 543–51.

including Wolff, were concerned with the general relationship between thought (mind) and language (body).[11] For Mendelssohn the relationship between thought and language rested on his theory of language. Like Maimonides, and following the trend in European thought since the Renaissance, Mendelssohn rejected the essentialist theory, instead embracing the eighteenth-century conception of language as a system of arbitrary signs.[12] With the appearance of his translation of Rousseau's *Discourse on Inequality* in 1756,[13] Mendelssohn found himself at the center of the debate that raged in Berlin in the 1750s and 1760s concerning the origins and nature of language. The theory of language as a system of arbitrary signs was formative for his thinking: not only did he devote an essay to it but it was the basis of his aesthetics[14] and his later account of idolatry.[15]

In the introduction to *Be'ur Millot ha-Higgayon*, Mendelssohn assigned logic a new role based on this theory of language. In contrast to the medieval assumption of internal speech as ontologically independent of and superior to external speech,[16] for Mendelssohn, thought and language are inextricably linked. It is only through language or speech that thought takes shape, develops fully, and becomes communicable.[17] Since abstraction cannot take place without the mental formulation of words, and since such abstraction is the basis of all intellectual discernment, "it is impossible to think about them without external speech."[18] This means that thought emerges from the relationship between the signs, yet as a result of the signs being arbitrary or imprecise, thought is liable to manifold

11. For the thought-speech problematic among Wolff and the Wolffians see Ulrich Ricken, *Sprachtheorie und Weltanschauung in der Europäischen Aufklärung: Zur Geschichte der Sprachtheorien des 18. Jahrhunderts und ihrer europäischen Rezeption nach der Französischen Revolution* (Berlin: Academie-Verlag, 1990), 210–53.

12. Hans Aarsleff, *From Locke to Saussure: Essays on the Study of Language and Intellectual History* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1982), 278–92.

13. *Johann Jacob Rousseau . . . Abhandlung von dem Ursprunge der Ungleichheit unter den Menschen* (Berlin: C.F. Voss, 1756).

14. Mendelssohn classified art according to the type of sign it used, e.g., "natural" for the beaux arts, "arbitrary" for belles-lettres.

15. He formulated the theory in "Über die Sprache," probably written in 1758–59. See *JubA*, 6,2:5–23. For his aesthetics see "Über die Hauptgrundsätze der schönen Künste und Wissenschaften" (1757), *JubA*, 1:427–52. For his view of idolatry see *Jerusalem* in *JubA*, 8:168–83; Arkush, *Jerusalem*, 104–17; and Freudenthal, *Religion*.

16. Stern, "Maimonides on Language," 181–86.

17. While this attention to the interdependence of language and thought bears an eighteenth-century imprimatur, it was not without some limited interest to medieval Jewish thinkers. The thirteenth-century Provençal philosopher Shem Tov b. Joseph Ibn Falaquera, for example, discussed the question of whether language preceded the conceptual understanding of something, vaguely suggesting that the two stood in some kind of a mutually dependent relationship. See his *Sefer ha-Mevaqqesh* (The Hague: Zusmans, 1778), 52; and Irene Zwiep, *Mother of Reason and Revelation: A Short History of Medieval Jewish Linguistic Thought* (Amsterdam: J.C. Gieben, 1997), 36–46.

18. See Mendelssohn's introduction, p. 68; and cf. his comments to Maimonides' introduction to the treatise, note v.

mistakes, including fundamental errors of judgment. Logic, then, was to be used to evaluate, organize, and clearly articulate all intellectual discernment; it would test and utilize sense experience, formulate propositions and syllogisms in their proper form; and it would confirm the validity of their conclusions. But the study of logic would also serve to heighten one's sensitivity to the quality of verbal articulation, to the precision (or imprecision) of language, and even to the limits of language, all in the interests of securing the general congruence of thought and language.

While formulating a general theory of language as a human and social convention, Mendelssohn insisted upon the distinctiveness and superiority of Hebrew by underscoring its naturalistic qualities. As in *Qohelet Musar*, he continued to speak of Hebrew as "*the* true language," and more importantly, maintained that "Hebrew refers to things with the appropriate noun consistent with its nature," suggesting that this ancient language was grounded in the "objective" order of things.[19] In effect, Mendelssohn continued to believe in the conventionality of all languages, simply suggesting that Hebrew was exceptional in that the connection between words (signifier) and things (signified) was uniquely attuned to the essence of things. Mendelssohn would further develop this view of the exceptional character of Hebrew in his Biblical exegesis. In many ways, this parallels many of Mendelssohn's attempts—in politics as well as religion—to insist upon the exceptional and particularistic status of Jews and Judaism within the framework of Enlightenment universalism.[20]

Over and above his attempt to recast the study of logic in eighteenth-century terms, a good deal of Mendelssohn's general introduction was devoted to preempting the anticipated traditionalist charge that this treatise was inimical to Judaism, at least that of the Ashkenazic communities arrayed across Central and Eastern Europe. Mendelssohn, for example, pointed out that the Talmudic dictum "restrain your children from *higgayon*" (Ber. 28b) was not to be taken as impugning the study of logic; it was, rather, a statement cautioning against the study of Scripture on the basis of reason and without reference to rabbinic tradition. In his deft reading, Mendelssohn was also able to suggest that Rashi's comments regarding this dictum recognized and reinforced the dual sense of *higgayon* as internal and external speech.[21]

Mendelssohn directly addressed the contention that the study of logic is to be discouraged or even prohibited because, as a field of inquiry derived from the ancient Greeks, it is alien to Jewish tradition. His introduction to *Be'ur Millot ha-Higgayon* did not articulate a cohesive response but instead proposed a number

19. See Mendelssohn's note b to Maimonides' introduction, p. 75 below. See also the first section of Mendelssohn's introduction to the Pentateuch, *Or li-Netivah*, below.

20. This is evident in the many issues he takes up in *Jerusalem*.

21. Cf. his handling of this dictum in *Qohelet Musar* above, pp. 29–30; and see Edward Breuer, "Haskalah and Scripture in Mendelssohn's Early Writings" (in Hebrew), *Zion* 59 (1994): 445–63.

of arguments directed at different concerns. He began by pointing out that as a tool, neither logic nor the rational notions that it shapes could substantively supplant the Torah and divine revelation. Nevertheless, logic was indispensable for the most basic determination of truth and falsehood. As for those concerned about the Greek origins of the study of logic, he pointed out that he was utilizing a text of Maimonides, one that neutralized the Greek provenance of logic by picking "the wheat from the chaff." By relying upon the unassailable authority of Maimonides, Mendelssohn could assure a wary eighteenth-century audience that such a text contained only "things that were honest and true and purified of all dross." He then stressed the fact that logic is by nature universal and unitary, that "unlike the natural and metaphysical sciences and ethics," the conclusions indicated by logical analysis are unequivocal and demonstrable. Logic, moreover, is neutral with respect to faith: it teaches nothing that undermines or even touches upon "principles of religion and belief and the pillars of the Torah." Logic is thus an auxiliary discipline, and Mendelssohn advocated that students treat it as such by devoting two hours per week to it in support of their pious studies.[22]

Among the many subjects that Mendelssohn addressed in his commentary, two may be singled out as particularly noteworthy. In the eighth chapter, Maimonides stated that knowledge based upon received traditions could be utilized in syllogisms even though they were not subject to logical analysis or substantiation. Since historical events (as opposed to natural ones) are by definition singular occurrences, their subjects constitute a separate category of knowledge whose veracity could only be judged by personal experience or by the reliability of the transmitter. Although Maimonides spoke of such traditions only in generic and universal terms, Mendelssohn immediately identified this category of propositions with the oral traditions preserved in rabbinic literature (*torah she-be-ʿal peh*). Yet Mendelssohn went further. He put aside the distinction between sacred and profane history by asserting that the veracity of Jewish oral law traditions was neither substantially nor epistemologically different from the veracity of mundane historical facts.

Mendelssohn's comments regarding the use of historical traditions might well have been formulated as an early response to contemporary historicist thinking, including that of his friend Lessing. Contemporary German thinkers exhibited a growing interest in the philosophy of history, in which they questioned the reliability of transmitted knowledge and collapsed the distinction between historical and eternal truths in favor of a certain progressive and linear historicism. In the face of this challenge, Mendelssohn wanted to buttress the unwavering

22. James Lehman described Mendelssohn's arguments as attributing a "radical neutrality to logic as a process"; see "Maimonides, Mendelssohn and the Me'asfim: Philosophy and the Biographical Imagination in the Early Haskalah," LBIYB 20 (1975): 90.

acceptance of traditional Jewish beliefs while at the same time demonstrating that history itself could not supply the kind of transcendent truth that German writers were beginning to claim. He therefore began to articulate new ideas about the nature of historical knowledge, and these reflections later informed his writings during the course of the Lavater affair and in *Jerusalem*.[23]

Mendelssohn also commented upon the relationship between revelation and politics. At the end of the fourteenth chapter, Maimonides described the "governance of the city" as a science whose aim was to build a just and well-ordered society, but he concluded his discussion by adding that "in these times, we have no need of all these—I mean the decrees and laws and *nimusim*—and men have been governed by divine laws." Maimonides, in other words, was suggesting that those "governed by divine laws" were not in need of the wisdom of the political philosophers; since one (although by no means the only) purpose of divine law[24] was to create social and political order, political philosophy was rendered superfluous. In his comment to this passage, Mendelssohn took Maimonides to be saying that "in these times," that is, in the diaspora, Jews had no need for works that aimed to perfect the polity, since Jews did not form an independent polity. Instead, they were to occupy themselves with divine law, namely, religious strictures that focused on the individual and relations between individuals. This can, of course, be read to say that the Torah did not constitute a handbook of politics, that Jewish law, in fact, was devoid of anything political and focused purely on issues of personal religiosity and morality. But Mendelssohn could also be read as making only a practical concession to exilic realities, saying that as long as the Jews lacked political independence they had no reason to study this particular science.

Mendelssohn would forcefully and clearly address the relationship of religion and politics in his German writings of the 1770s and 1780s, but at this early stage, he seemed content to gloss over this issue.[25]

Finally, since Mendelssohn was here directly engaging a Maimonidean text, the question that naturally emerges is that of intellectual kinship and identity. Already in his lifetime, there were those who would view Mendelssohn as a latter-day Maimonides, and the two were viewed in certain eighteenth- and

23. See Mendelssohn's comments below on ch. 8, note f, pp. 84–85.

24. Joel Kraemer has argued that Maimonides was not referring specifically or exclusively to the Torah, but to all monotheistic divine law, including Islam and possibly Christianity; see "Maimonides on the Philosophic Sciences in his Treatise on the Art of Logic," in Kraemer, ed., *Perspectives on Maimonides: Philosophical and Historical Studies* (Oxford: Litttman Library, 1991), 98–100. Note that Kraemer's discussion was based on the newly discovered Arabic original (see below, n. 42). Cf. Leo Strauss, "Maimonides' Statement on Political Science," in Leo Strauss, ed., *What Is Political Philosophy?* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1959), 155–69.

25. On Mendelssohn's mature political thinking, see Edward Breuer, "Mendelssohn's Jewish Political Philosophy," in M. Gottlieb and C. Manekin, eds., *Moses Mendelssohn: Enlightenment, Religion, Politics, Nationalism* (Bethesda: University of Maryland Press, 2015), 1–48.

nineteenth-century circles as sharing a heroic image. But for all his respect and admiration for Maimonides, Mendelssohn's commentary on *Millot ha-Higgayon* points up the many ways in which he quietly departed from the medieval master or took issue with him. In gauging Mendelssohn's relationship with Maimonides, one must scrutinize carefully the substantive points of agreement and disagreement and take account of the significantly differing philosophical frameworks separating medieval Aristotelianism from Enlightenment philosophy.[26]

THE TEXT AND ITS PUBLICATION HISTORY

The Maimonidean Text

While the original Maimonidean treatise on logic was written in Arabic, medieval and early modern Ashkenazic scholars were familiar with this work mainly through the mid-thirteenth-century Hebrew translation of Moses Ibn Tibbon. This Ibn Tibbon translation served as the basis of the first three printed editions of Maimonides' treatise: Basel 1527, Venice 1550, and Cremona 1566. The editions of Venice and Cremona were identical, but they differed from that printed in Basel. The text of Maimonides' *Millot ha-Higgayon* that Mendelssohn printed as the basis of his commentary generally followed that of the Venice/Cremona editions but was not identical to it, and the text he published in 1765 sometimes diverged from all three earlier editions. Mendelssohn clearly found some passages to be textually problematic or difficult to read, and in a number of instances his text offered a smoother and less encumbered reading. Mendelssohn did not know Arabic and nowhere speaks of consulting manuscript versions of the Ibn Tibbon Hebrew translation, although such manuscripts were extant.[27] Rather, in the absence of any explicit discussion of the Maimonidean text and its apparent problems, Mendelssohn's textual revisions appear to be based upon his own careful and reasoned consideration of how the text ought to appear.

Mendelssohn's Commentary

Mendelssohn's commentary on Maimonides' *Millot ha-Higgayon* has been published at least eighteen times. Three of these editions appeared during

26. Lehmann speaks of "a Maimonidean framework within and against which Mendelssohn had to work"; see "Maimonides, Mendelssohn and the Me'asfim," 93. Sorkin, *Mendelssohn*, 125–29, has argued that Mendelssohn was not a Maimonidean. Cf. Harvey, "Mendelssohn and Maimon on the Tree of Knowledge."

27. The collection of David Oppenheim, for example, contained at least two manuscript copies of the Ibn Tibbon translation, and a third manuscript of *Millot ha-Higgayon* with no translator listed. See *Qohelet David: Reshimat Oṣar ha-Sefarim . . . asfo . . . David Oppenheim* (Hamburg: he-Aḥim Bonn, 1826) # 279, 1159, and 1644. Although such manuscripts were extant, it is unclear whether Mendelssohn had access to them, or whether he was even interested in pursuing them.

Mendelssohn's lifetime, although his name was not mentioned in the first two; it appeared for the first time only in the third edition in 1784. The first edition (Frankfurt am Oder, 1761) was published by Samson Kalir, an obscure Jerusalemite and medical student in Berlin and Frankfurt on the Oder. The Hebrew title page and Kalir's introduction referred to the commentary as "a brief and functional commentary that has never yet been published" without stating that Kalir was the author, although the Latin title page did impute authorship to him. Some scholars assume that this first edition was pirated,[28] although others suggest that Mendelssohn chose to have the commentary published without attribution, much as he had published his early German writings anonymously.[29]

The second edition (Berlin, 1765), which serves as the basis of the translation in the present volume,[30] was published by another obscure medical student residing in Berlin. This edition contained a commentary that was significantly expanded and accompanied by an entirely new introduction. Toward the end of this unsigned introduction, Mendelssohn writes in the first person—and with no apparent recrimination—that

> the Torah scholar and doctor R. Samson Kalir urged me to write a brief commentary on Maimonides' work, which I did, and which he subsequently published in Frankfurt an Oder. That printing contained innumerable errors. In addition, the commentary was too concise for beginners, and therefore inadequate. I therefore expanded that commentary in order to help intelligent individuals who were not used to traversing these paths.

Despite the anonymity of the first two editions, there never seemed to be any doubt regarding Mendelssohn's authorship. It was apparently one of these editions that Solomon Maimon (1753–1800) was reading when he sought entrance to Berlin: Maimon claimed that when the Jewish community's representative caught sight of the book he sent Maimon packing, although given

28. Two years after the publication of this first edition Mendelssohn penned a sermon titled *Friedenspredigt* to mark the end of the Seven Years' War. It was delivered by the chief rabbi of Berlin in March 1763 and published by Mendelssohn's friend Christoph Nicolai shortly thereafter. In the notes to his edition of Lessing's collected writings and the Mendelssohn-Lessing correspondence, Nicolai explained that "since he didn't want to be known [as the author], Moses inserted in the title as a joke: 'Translated from German by R.S.K.,' saying that since Rabbi Samson Kalir appropriated my Hebrew [work on] Logic, he may now also take my sermon for himself." *Gotthold Ephraim Lessings Sämmtliche Schriften* (Berlin: Voss, 1794), 27:515; this was later incorporated into *GS*, 5:223–24. See Altmann, *Mendelssohn*, 69.

29. Kayserling, *Moses Mendelssohn*, 146–47; Altmann, *Mendelssohn*, 69; Jacob I. Dienstag, "Commentators, Translators and Editors of Maimonides' Treatise on Logic," *Koroth* 9 (1986): 3–4, 282–85. Kalir's preface is also reprinted in *JubA*, 14:298–300.

30. Although the text that appears in the *Gesammelte Schriften Jubiläumsausgabe* differs occasionally from the 1765 edition and thus the translation offered here, page references to that modern edition is maintained for convenience and accessibility.

the utter lack of opposition or criticism of Mendelssohn's work, the claim remains suspect.[31]

The third edition, now with Mendelssohn's name on the title page, was published in 1784 by the maskilic *Ḥevrat Ḥinukh Ne'arim* press [Society for Education][32] in Berlin and edited by Aaron Zechariah Friedenthal, known also as Aaron Jaroslav, a participant in Mendelssohn's Bible project. In his preface, Jaroslav wrote that few copies remained of the earlier editions, and that these editions, in any event, were replete with errors. He went on to say that in this new edition, he added "things that he had heard directly from the commentator [i.e., Mendelssohn] or from his books, and anything I learned on these matters from other scholars, and included them in their appropriate place." Indeed, this 1784 edition does occasionally depart from the 1765 edition by including glosses or revisions of difficult or unclear passages, although it remains unclear which changes or additions were initiated or at least approved by Mendelssohn. Jaroslav also published the first of the posthumous editions (Lemberg, 1790/91), appending a new and lengthier preface.[33] A few years later, *Ḥevrat Ḥinukh Ne'arim* published yet another edition of *Be'ur Millot ha-Higgayon*, this time with a preface and accompanying notes of another active maskil and follower of Mendelssohn, Isaac Satanow (Berlin, 1795; reprinted in 1799).

The work was republished nine times in the nineteenth century at presses in Central and East Central Europe: Prague, 1805;[34] Prague, 1810–11; Vienna, 1822;[35] Warsaw, 1825–26; Breslau, 1828;[36] Bratislava [Pressburg], 1833; Bratislava [Pressburg], 1853; Warsaw, 1865; Lemberg, 1876.[37] It would appear that for more than a century, editions of this commentary served as *the* study text of Maimonides' work; with one exception, in fact, all eighteenth- and nine-

31. Dienstag, "Commentators, Translators and Editors of Maimonides' Treatise on Logic," 274–75; *Solomon Maimon: An Autobiography*, trans. J. Clark Murray (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2001), 211.

32. This press served and was associated with the Berlin *Freischule* [Jewish Free School], an institution thoroughly shaped by the ideals of the early Haskalah.

33. In this preface, he repeats—although in slightly different language—how in the preparation of the 1784 edition he was aided by Mendelssohn in clarifying the text, and that he "expanded [Mendelssohn's] commentary in a number of places" to ease the way for students of this work; see *JubA*, 14:307.

34. This edition included only the first seven chapters of the text and Mendelssohn's commentary. It contained a loose German translation of Mendelssohn's introduction produced by an otherwise unknown figure, Isaac Leib b. Eliezer from the Moravian town of Dresnitz.

35. This edition included a German translation (in Hebrew letters) of the Maimonidean text penned by the Hungarian-born maskil Moses Samuel Neumann, who also added his own commentary. This edition may also have been reprinted in 1823. Neumann's commentary was included in the 1833 and 1853 editions as well.

36. This edition included yet another German translation of the Maimonidean text, this time in Latin characters, by an otherwise unknown writer by the name of Solomon Heilberg.

37. The 1810–11, 1822, 1825–26, 1833, 1853, 1865, and 1876 editions included the notes of Isaac Satanow.

teenth-century editions of Maimonides' treatise were accompanied by Mendelssohn's commentary. Quite typical is the statement on the part of Avraham Ber Gottlober (1810–99), an East European maskil and translator of Mendelssohn's *Jerusalem* into Hebrew (1867), who recalled that when at the precocious age of ten he expressed interest in studying logic, his father approached a learned friend who provided him with a copy of *Be'ur Millot ha-Higgayon*. The friend, obviously well acquainted with the work, offered to help Gottlober with the difficult chapter (seven) he was reading.[38]

There have also been at least three twentieth-century editions of Maimonides' treatise accompanied by Mendelssohn's commentary. The first of these was published in Berlin in 1928, and a decade later *Be'ur Millot ha-Higgayon* was published in volume 14 of Mendelssohn's collected writings accompanied by extensive notes and textual emendations.[39] The most recent edition was published in Israel and contained Maimonides' text in Arabic and a new Hebrew translation by the outstanding Yemenite scholar of Maimonides, R. Joseph Kafah. In his preface, R. Kafah noted that "everyone agrees that the best commentary is that of Mendelssohn, despite its length and despite having incorporated elements of his own philosophy."[40]

SECONDARY LITERATURE

The standard scholarly introduction to Maimonides' *Millot ha-Higgayon* in English is Israel Efros, "Maimonides' Treatise on Logic: The Original Arabic and Three Hebrew Translations," *Proceedings of the American Academy for Jewish Research* 8 (1938), 3–33.[41] See also Raymond L. Weiss, "On the Scope of Maimonides' *Logic*, Or, What Joseph Knew," in Ruth Link-Salinger, ed., *A Straight Path: Studies in Medieval Philosophy and Culture* (Washington, D.C.: Catholic University of America Press, 1988), 255–65. A fine scholarly work focusing on the fourteenth chapter of the treatise is Joel Kraemer, "Maimonides on the Philosophic Sciences in His Treatise on the Art of Logic," in Kraemer, ed., *Perspectives on Maimonides: Philosophical and Historical Studies* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991), 77–104. Martin D. Yaffe has recently discussed and translated Leo Strauss's German translation of selections from *Be'ur Millot ha-Higgayon* in *Leo Strauss on Moses Mendelssohn* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2012), 18, 251–59; the translations, which include Mendelssohn's introduction in its

38. *Zikhronot u-Masa'ot* 2 vols. (Jerusalem: Mosad Bialik, 1976), 1:83. Gottlober used an early edition without Mendelssohn's name. Our thanks to Shmuel Feiner for this reference.

39. *JubA*, 14:23–119. Prefaces to the 1765, 1784, and 1791 editions were also reprinted in this volume, pp. 303–13.

40. *Be'ur Melekhet ha-Higgayon* (Kiryat Ono, Israel, 1997), intro. 1.

41. See, in addition, the references in the following note.

entirety as well as parts of chapters 4, 7, and 11, are only available as an online appendix at http://press.uchicago.edu/sites/strauss/MM_logic.pdf.

For a discussion of Mendelssohn's interest in this work in the context of the European and Jewish Enlightenments, see James H. Lehman, "Maimonides, Mendelssohn and the Me'asfim: Philosophy and the Biographical Imagination in the Early Haskalah," LBIYB 20 (1975), 87–108; and Sorkin, *Mendelssohn*, 18–22. On the place of this work in Mendelssohn's oeuvre, and with a focus on Mendelssohn's view of the study of history, see Edward Breuer, "On Miracles and Events Past: Mendelssohn on History," *Jewish History* 9 (1995), 27–52.

For bibliographical information regarding various editions of *Be'ur Millot ha-Higgayon*, see *JubA*, 14: xix–xxi; and Jacob Dienstag, "Commentators, Translators and Editors of Maimonides' Treatise on Logic," *Koroth* 9 (1986), 3–4, 282–85.

NOTES TO THE TRANSLATION

The translation of the Maimonidean treatise and Mendelssohn's introduction and commentary is based upon the edition of 1765. The Maimonidean treatise has been translated into English in its entirety by Israel Efros,[42] and Muhsin Mahdi,[43] Charles Butterworth,[44] and Joel Kraemer[45] have also translated parts of the treatise. These translations gave primary consideration to the extant Arabic originals; they did not focus on the early modern printed editions of Ibn Tibbon's Hebrew translation, and had no reason to consider Mendelssohn's emendations. These English translations were consulted and carefully considered, and their renderings of many medieval terms and phrases will be noted in the translation that appears below. Nevertheless, our translation is based on Mendelssohn's slightly revised Hebrew version of Ibn Tibbon's translation.[46] Substantive divergences from earlier printed editions will be indicated in the notes.

42. Israel Efros, "Maimonides' Treatise on Logic: The Original Arabic and Three Hebrew Translations," in PAAJR 8 (1938): 34–65. In the late 1950s, Mübahat Türker discovered two manuscripts of the Arabic original of Maimonides' treatise that shed fresh light on some passages, especially with regard to ch. 14; see the discussion of her work in Davidson, *Maimonides*, 315–17. In light of Türker's work, Efros published some notes revising his earlier work: "Maimonides' Arabic Treatise on Logic," PAAJR 34 (1966): 155–60; and "Maimonides' Treatise on Logic: The New Arabic Text and Its Light on the Hebrew Versions," *Jewish Quarterly Review* 53 (1963): 269–273.

43. Mahdi offered the first English translation of ch. 14 based on the newly discovered Arabic original (see the previous note); it appeared in M. Mahdi and R. Lerner, eds., *Medieval Political Philosophy* (Toronto: Free Press, 1963), 189–90.

44. "Treatise on the Art of Logic," in Raymond Weiss with Charles Butterworth, eds., *Ethical Writings of Maimonides* (New York: New York University Press, 1975), 156–61. Butterworth's translation included selections from ch. 3, 8, and 14.

45. "Maimonides on the Philosophic Sciences," 77–104; this essay included a translation of ch. 14 with discussion and analysis.

46. The Maimonidean text used in the 1761, 1765, and all later editions were identical.

The translations of Mendelssohn's introduction, prefaces, and commentary are also based on the 1765 edition. Although Mendelssohn was alive when the new 1784 edition appeared, it is unclear whether he approved of the revisions or whether Jaroslav introduced them on his own. The most pertinent additions and clarifications will be cited in the annotations.

Mendelssohn used the sequence of Hebrew letters to serve as text references to those words and phrases that he explicated in his commentary; these are indicated using Latin lettering in superscript. Mendelssohn occasionally introduced some notes—no doubt as late additions—using * or †; these have been reproduced in kind.

SELECTIONS FROM *BE'UR MILLOT HA-HIGGAYON*

MENDELSSOHN'S INTRODUCTION[1]

The word *higgayon* is a noun derived from the root *hagah*. It can either indicate concerted reflection and contemplation °(*Meditation, Betrachtung*), which philosophers call internal speech or thought, or it can refer to the sounds and utterances of the speech organ, which is called external speech and vocal expression. [Scriptural passages such as:] *And you shall contemplate it* [*ve-hagita bo*] *day and night* °(Josh. 1:8); *I reflected upon* [*ve-hagiti*] *all your doings* °(Ps. 77:13, 143:5); *My heart will meditate* [*ve-hagut*] *upon wisdom* °(Ps. 49:4)—all of these speak of concerted reflection and intellectual diligence, since it is said with reference to the heart, which in Hebrew refers to the faculty of the rational soul to understand and comprehend the truth of things. However, [scriptural passages such as:] *And my tongue, if it utters* [*yehgeh*] *deceit* °(Job 27:4); *The mouth of the righteous utters* [*yehgeh*] *wisdom* °(Ps. 37:30); *Your tongue utters* [*tehgeh*] *treachery* °(Isa. 59:3); *They make no sound* [*yehgu*] *in their throat* °(Ps. 115:7); *The sound* [*ve-hegeh*] *that comes out of his mouth* °(Job 37:2)—all these indicate vocal expression. And [likewise,] in the language of the Sages °(*Sanhedrin* 90a) "one who pronounces [*ha-hogeh*] the Name of God as it is written" refers to one who allows the letters of the Tetragrammaton to pass from his lips.[2]

Both these matters [i.e., internal and external speech] are referred to by the same word on account of their relationship, since vocal expression and thought are like body and soul, joined and attached to each other with a strong and firm bond. Just as the soul, if separated from the body, renders it an *inert stone* (Hab. 2:19), so too the unembodied soul would be invisible to mortals, since it cannot become known to man insofar as he remains a living being except through its deeds. This is also the case with regard to speech and thought. Vocal expression

1. Maimonides' introduction, with Mendelssohn's notes, appears below.

2. This rabbinic statement refers to the tradition whereby Jews were forbidden from pronouncing the biblical name of God when it appeared as *yhvh*.

without mindful purpose and rational forethought is nothing but sound akin to *roaring and shaking* (Isa. 29:6) and not the sound of words. A faint internal notion[3] would neither be known nor revealed and would fail to make any impression on the world outside the soul unless it assumes bodily form by means of some physical movement. This happens when the idea starts out from the soul of the speaker and goes to the brain; from there to the moving extremities, among them the organ of speech; then into the air, giving rise to different movements, which go from the air to the ear of the listener so that he understands the intention of the speaker. This connection between the mental and the bodily is an exceedingly wondrous matter, upon which we recite the daily blessing "[Blessed are you Lord . . .] who acts wondrously," as R. Moses Isserles wrote in *Oraḥ Ḥayyim*, section six.[4] All investigation fails to arrive at a full understanding of how a physical movement in the brain can be transformed into something mental, that being the apprehension and sentiment that takes place in the soul; and likewise, how that mental apprehension gives rise to a physical movement in the brain. As for that which the *Magen Avraham* wrote ad loc.,[5] citing *Sefer ha-Kavvanot*, "that the soul takes pleasure in the spiritual quality of the food, and the body from the physical quality of the food";[6] even though this idea is consistent with true investigation, as recent scientists have acknowledged—that all foods produce blood, which in turn produces the pure and clear fluid that in German is called *Nervensaft* [nervous fluid], which is the source of voluntary movement and sensation—nevertheless, these things do not explain the marvel that we mentioned. Since this aforementioned fluid is something fine and pure and is not grasped by the senses, it may therefore be referred to as something mental. Nevertheless, it is contained in space, circumscribed in three dimensions, and moves spatially from place to place. This is unlike the apprehension of the soul, which is not contained in space, circumscribed by dimension, and

3. *ha-ʿinyan ha-daq ha-penimi*, which could mean something fine and subtle or fleeting and ephemeral.

4. R. Moses Isserles of Cracow (c. 1520–1572), one of the outstanding rabbinic authorities of early modern Ashkenazic Jewry, was the author of glosses to R. Joseph Caro's *Shulḥan ʿArukh*, the comprehensive sixteenth-century code of Jewish law. In his gloss to *Oraḥ Ḥayyim*, § 6:1, concerning the first blessings to be recited in the morning, R. Isserles added the following comment on the blessing recited after relieving oneself: "One can also explain 'who acts wondrously' with regard to His preserving man's spirit within him and for connecting something spiritual (*ruḥani*) with something physical."

5. *Magen Avraham* was the work of R. Abraham Abele Gombiner (c. 1635–1683), one of the leading Polish scholars of his day, and this work was a series of glosses to the *Oraḥ Ḥayyim* section of the *Shulḥan ʿArukh*. The reference here is to his gloss to the text cited immediately above; see the previous note.

6. R. Gombiner was citing either *Sefer ha-Kavvanot* (Venice, 1620) or the *Shaʿar ha-Kavvanot* section of *ʿEṣ Ḥayyim*. They are fundamentally the same work, stemming back to the writings of R. Hayyim Vital (1542–1620), and are based on the teachings of the great Kabbalistic master, R. Isaac Luria (1534–1572); they contain discussions of the mystical meanings of prayers and the proper intentions necessary for their performance.

susceptible to locomotion. Even so, we do not know how locomotion produces apprehension, nor the reverse. But we have already deviated considerably from our intention here, for all we wanted was to indicate the strong and firm bond between internal and external speech.

There is another, deeper aspect to this issue that will shed light on the need of internal speech for external speech and that is based upon the following principle: all sense perception is of particulars, and all intellectual perception is of universals. That is, every sense perception is related to the sensed object, which is one particular thing, while intellectual perception reflects upon the universals of things, which are the properties that include many individuals,[7] species, and genera, as will become clear to one who peruses this book °(chapter 10). It is well known that one cannot abstract[8] the universals of things and represent them in his thoughts without the medium of speech, that is, until he represents in his thoughts the words that indicate those universals. For example, sweetness, courage, and wisdom are universals. It is, however, impossible for a person to represent the notion of sweetness in his thought abstracted from a sweet thing or the notion of wisdom abstracted from a wise individual or the notion of valor abstracted from a brave man, were he not able to represent letters or syllables for the word "sweetness," "valor," or "wisdom" in his soul, as designated in external speech for those matters.[9] Since all intellectual perceptions pertain to universals, it is impossible to think about them without external speech.[10] It is clear from these two aspects why the Hebrew language has one word to indicate vocal expression and apprehension, i.e., the root *hagah*, with all its ramifications, as mentioned.

The word *higgayon* derived from this root is not found in Scripture except in Psalms[11] and its meaning there is [indicated] by its subject, namely, rigorous examination and investigation °(*Betrachtung*)—that is, the concerted deliberation and thought given to a wondrous matter from among the wonders of creation and providence that the Psalmist was then contemplating, as will be clear to one who peruses those verses. The Psalmist said, *Thus is the Eternal known;* [by] *the judgment that he has dispensed—the wicked must be ensnared in the work of his own hands* (Ps. 9:17), and with regard to this insight he said elsewhere, *the irrational* [man] *does not see into it; the unthinking does not comprehend* (Ps. 92:7). Here [in the first verse] the Psalmist added *O, the great thought* [*higgayon selah*] °(Ps. 9:17),

7. I.e., particular members of a species.

8. The 1784 edition had: ". . . it is almost impossible to abstract. . . ."

9. The 1784 edition expanded on this point: "By means of the letters and syllables he will arouse in his mind the desired abstract matter through the capacity to remember. . . ."

10. For the philosophical-linguistic context of these remarks and their novelty, see the editors' introduction.

11. Mendelssohn overlooked the one other appearance of the word *higgayon* in Scripture, Lam. 3:62.

i.e., that it is proper to contemplate—*selah*—the wondrous ways of providence, how by his own doing the wicked will be ensnared and *will fall into the grave he made* (Ps. 7:16). All his determination and success *is of no avail on the day of wrath* (Prov. 11:4); it will then be known that God has dispensed judgment and punishes the wicked in accordance with his wickedness.[12] *The wicked will* not *flourish and evildoers will* not *blossom;* rather, *they will be destroyed forever* (Ps. 92:8). [The word *higgayon* was thus added] because this observation is one of the pillars of the Torah, as is well known.

In the Talmud °(Ber. 28b) we find: "Our Sages taught: When R. Eliezer fell ill his students came to visit him and said: 'Master, instruct us how to conduct our lives so that we merit the eternal life of the world-to-come.' He responded: 'Be attentive to your colleagues' honor, and restrain your children from *higgayon*,' etc." The [last statement] was explained in the *ʿArukh* as the "elucidation of a verse according to its outward appearance."[13] Rashi explained it thus: "Do not allow [your children] to be overly preoccupied with Scripture because it entices. Another interpretation: [restrain them] from the prattle of children."[14] Rashi's first explanation is almost commensurate with that of the *ʿArukh*, since one who allows his sons to be overly preoccupied with Scripture without *training a lad in the way he ought to go* (Prov. 22:6) in the traditions and interpretations of the Sages causes them to interpret Scripture according to its outward appearance and that which appeals to the *spirit of their own understanding* (Job 20:3). Even as they grow older, they will not consider that which was received and transmitted to us in a direct line extending up to Moses regarding the explanation of Scripture and its allusions and secrets, since from their youth they will have been trained and accustomed to judge with their intellect and to rely on their own understanding. According to this interpretation, R. Eliezer took *higgayon* to mean internal speech and thought. He cautioned his students to restrain their children from relying on their own thoughts °(*Nachdenken*, *meditatio*) in interpreting the Torah; rather, they should heed tradition and not deviate to the right or left from what our elders taught us, for this is the essence and foundation of the Oral Law. According to the second explanation that Rashi offered, [R. Eliezer's] intention was that you should restrain your children from prattle °(*plaudern*). In this instance, *higgayon* is understood as external speech and vocal expression. You thus see the word *higgayon* in Scripture and the Talmud to indicate thought and speech °(*Denken und Sprechen*).

The word *logica*, which philosophers regularly use to indicate *higgayon*, is derived from *logos*, which in Greek can also connote speech and vocal expression

12. The last phrase here, *yeshalem le-rashaʿ ke-rishʿato*, was taken from the popular liturgical poem *Yigdal*.

13. See *ʿArukh*, s.v. *heh–gimel*.

14. Rashi to Ber. 28b; cf. Mendelssohn's earlier discussion of the same passage in *Qohelet Musar*, section 2, pp. 29–30 above.

as well as idea and thought; and it can sometimes [connote] the science that is the mental discipline of thinking true and correct thoughts. There is no word in Latin that joins these two meanings, which is why those writing in Latin made use of the Greek word. Likewise, in their writings they used the [Greek] word *dialectica*, derived from *dialegein* and the root *legein*, meaning either *erzählen* or *überlegen*; as such, this word also combines these two meanings.[15] And when translators in the days of Maimonides and R. Solomon b. Abraham Adret translated philosophical texts from the languages of other nations into Hebrew, they found that the word *higgayon* corresponded in every respect with the word *logica* or the word *dialectica*, which is the study of how to guide [both] the mind and vocal expression and knowing the proper ways to use them.[16] In what follows below you will see that this knowledge was built upon various means of devising a syllogism and demonstration, such that one could say that *higgayon* teaches one the modes of syllogism and demonstration and the means of utilizing them.

The benefits of such inquiry are many and compelling, and only a crooked mind or one devoid of all wisdom would dismiss them. For God gave man a mind to know, understand, and comprehend the great, awesome, and limitless wonders of creation, in order to appreciate His greatness and majesty; and to thank Him for his abundant goodness which He confers at each and every moment upon his creations, from the heavenly hosts to the *creeping things that crawl upon the earth* (Gen. 1:26), as the author of *The Duties of the Heart* wrote at length about the significance of such reflection in his "Gate on Contemplation." [Without such inquiry] how would one know the way to reach these lofty concepts? And how would we guard against errors and pitfalls if we do not endeavor to understand the ways of the intellect? How would the soul recognize and distinguish between truth and falsehood? In what [other] manner could [the soul] endeavor and proceed from first intelligibles known to the boor and the educated alike, from apprehension to apprehension, until it attains sublime insights and *tastes, with the tip of the stick in its hand, from the sweet nectar* (1 Sam. 14:43) of exalted and wondrous wisdom, reserved for the upright who walk without blame—and for which every intelligent person who fears God yearns

15. In the 1784 edition, this sentence was rewritten: "They called that science *logica* and sometimes *dialectica*, which is also a Greek word, in this instance derived from *legein*, which refers to speech. The word *dialectica*, however, specifically refers to the give-and-take and debate on such matters, while the word *logica* refers to the means of study through correct thinking and precise articulation."

16. The 1784 edition here added: "For this reason, they chose the word [*higgayon*] and specifically attached it to that matter, being the art of *higgayon* (*die Kunst richtig zu denken und zu sprechen*). This usage of *higgayon* is not that of Scripture nor that of rabbinic literature, but rather a word given new meaning for the purposes of translation."

with a desire as *powerful as death; and if one would give all his household wealth for the love* of wisdom*, he would disdain, despise it* (Song 8:6–7)?

It is indeed true that the human intellect alone, without the Torah and [oral] tradition, will not *satisfy the thirsty soul* (Ps. 107:9) that yearns to refine itself in the supernal light. For if one relies on his intelligence alone without the help and protection of the Torah and the [oral] tradition, *he will grope like the blind man in the dark* (Deut. 28:29); the ways of logic will not suffice to guard against confusion and pitfalls, as occurred to many honored scholars upon whom the light of the divine Torah never shone or who became haughty with pride and conceit to despise the divine Torah saying *my wisdom will aid me, for I am clever* (Ecc. 2:9, Isa. 10:13). *They run on and tumble into a deep grave from which there is no recovery* (Ps. 27:2, 140:11); *they were ensnared and caught* (Isa. 28:12) in a trap of error and confusion. However, even one who chooses the divine Torah and truly and fully believes the words of His Prophets and Sages, does not, on account of this, escape from the need to distinguish between truth and falsehood and to guard against errors in beliefs and opinions, in the details and particulars of the laws, and all that the Sages derived from the hermeneutic principles by which the Torah is interpreted. He will sometimes need to compare dicta, at other times to draw distinctions between them. He may need to determine something by means of proof and demonstration, or weigh it on the scale of clear reasoning. He may be able to arrive at the truth by himself, or deliberate with an interlocutor and argue with one who challenges his positions. With all these means, he will need the modes of syllogism and demonstration to determine the unknown from the known and to learn the obscure from the manifest.

The general notion is that every intelligent and wise individual, whoever he may be, must use these methods of logic to construct syllogisms and to construct reliable demonstrations *that will not fail* (Isa. 58:11). And if one were to say "I can be wise without utilizing the ways of logic" it is like saying "I will shut my eyes and look up at the stars above," or "I will speak with people and write books without making use of grammar"—is he not jesting? You will see in my commentary on chapter seven of this work that just as an individual can use the organ of speech and communication without knowing how the lips, tongue, palate, and teeth move about in order to create sounds, or how one can walk without paying attention to how the blood vessels and nerves respond to the desire to move one's legs one after another, so too a wise individual can use grammar or logic without thinking about their particulars. Nonetheless, he does not cease from using them. And so, it is befitting for an intelligent person who loves truth to examine them in order that he grasp their veracity and qualities, and to train his soul in this endeavor in order to guide his reason and train it to follow *the right path and just ways* (Ps. 27:11, 23:3) and not to deviate right or left from the way of truth.

Should you think: "Wasn't this discipline an innovation of Aristotle and his students? What have I and the son of Nicomachus in common that I should *keep vigil at his door* (Prov. 8:34) to learn from him the manner of enlightenment and its ways? Have our rabbinic decisors not warned us about following after him and forbidden us to read his books? These are profane books[17] that lure the mind with faulty reasoning and deceptive ideas. Moreover, if with regard to Jewish scholars the Sages taught: 'If a teacher is like a heavenly angel, seek Torah from him, but if not, do not seek Torah from him'[18]—then how much more so this man who is not of our nation and never saw the light of the Torah! Even if you surely find something true among his teachings, it would be negated by the many mistakes and errors accompanying it." Know, my friend, that the *Lord has compassion on you* (Isa. 54:10). For I have not urged you to read the books of Aristotle but to learn from the words of the Prince of Torah, Rabbi Moses b. Maimon, who gathered and picked the wheat from the chaff and treated this Greek as R. Meir treated Aḥer—he ate the fruit and discarded the rind.[19] Since he paved the way and removed all obstacles from the path of wisdom and only accepted from gentile scholars things which were honest, true, and purified of all dross and rust and in which *there is nothing perverse* (Prov. 8:8), one may rely upon this great rabbi and follow in his footsteps.

We should not fear *the outspread net* of human inquiry (Prov. 1:17), since we recognize that this sage was *wholehearted with his God* (1 Kgs. 8:61) and cleaved to His Torah and commandments. Moreover, there is an advantage to the principles of logic over other fields of inquiry since they are not contingent upon judgment or opinion but are elucidated and determined with decisive demonstrations that are not subject to question or dispute, unlike the natural and metaphysical sciences and ethics, with regard to which there has been no end to controversy and divergent ways of reasoning and assessing probabilities due to the changing times and circumstances, temperaments, and training, as we know. Not so the science of logic, since it is built upon the foundations of incontrovertible demonstration akin to geometry and astronomy[20] where there is no room to

17. *sefarim ḥiṣoniyyim*, lit.: "external books." In its original rabbinic usage, this referred narrowly to the non-canonical, Apocryphal literature of the late biblical era. By the eighteenth century, the term was broadly used to include literature written by non-Jews, but it was also shorthand for material that was either religiously objectionable or inappropriate insofar as it took time away from the study of Torah. Mendelssohn's reference to *sefarim ḥiṣoniyyim* at the end of the next paragraph made clear that he used the term as a reference to profane literature.

18. Ḥag. 15b.

19. Ibid. Aḥer, "the Other," was the name given to the Talmudic sage Elisha b. Abuyah after his apostasy. The section of the Talmud alluded to here by Mendelssohn contains an extended discussion on attitudes and responses to Aḥer's heresy and abandonment of Jewish traditions.

20. *ha-handasiyah ve-ḥeshbon tequfot ve-gimaṭriyot* appears to be redundant. The reference to *ḥeshbon tequfot ve-gimaṭriyot* echoes M. Avot 3:18 and the medieval usage of the terms (see, e.g.,

deviate from the truth. There is also nothing in the ways of logic that *raises one up and causes one to wander in the desert* with no God (Job 12:23–24), for they are removed from the principles of religion and belief and the pillars of the Torah, and they have nothing to do with commandments and prohibitions. Even with all the differences of morals, ideas, and religions, *all who live in the world and inhabit the earth* (Isa. 18:3) would accede to logicians, since the purpose of this science is not to determine truth and falsehood or good and evil in themselves, but to make known the means by which to distinguish truth from falsehood and good from evil.[21] There is no doubt that He who endows man with knowledge[22] planted in his heart the ways of intellection and established for him trustworthy rules and laws by which he will deduce one thing from another and derive the unknown from the known and arrive at the truth. Given that God created man in His image, there is no doubt that He wanted man to become learned in those ways and use them to contemplate *the Eternal's plan and His design* (Isa. 5:12) and to study His Torah and understand its meanings and the depths of its secrets. Therefore, one who studies those ways [of logic] is doing the will of his Creator; heaven forbid that he should be deemed one who deals with nonsense or with profane books—heaven save us from such a notion.

Now, I know that the day is short and the work is great,[23] and *the few and afflicted years of a* man's *life* (Gen. 47:9) are barely enough to take in the Talmud, Rashi, and Tosafot, as is incumbent upon us to study and to teach, to preserve and to perform.[24] These [rabbinic] texts are of paramount importance; how can a man turn his mind to occupy itself with such things that are ancillary to wisdom?[25] Yet I observed that these things are very easy and an intelligent individual could master them effortlessly in two or three days. It would be appropriate for youths *keeping vigil at the doors* of Torah (Prov. 8:34) to set aside one or two hours per week to focus on them, since they would also be highly beneficial for the study of Talmud, Rashi, and Tosafot and in collegial repartee, as they direct man's reasoning along a straight path and guide him in the ways of truth. They also serve to perfect external speech, man's glory, and his superiority over earthly animals. If a man cannot properly arrange his words according to the rules of language, how will he attain the truth in interpreting the Torah and the

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Maimonides' *Mishneh Torah*, Yesode ha-Torah 3:5), and it plainly refers to astronomy and geometry. *Handasiyah* is a medieval term that also refers to geometry, as is evident in Mendelssohn's own use of the word below in ch. 8; see p. 87.

21. Cf. *Kuzari* IV:25, V:14.

22. *ḥonen le-ʾadam daʿat,* from the weekday *ʿAmidah*.

23. M. Avot 2:15.

24. *lilmod u-lelamed, lishmor ve-laʿasot*, another phrase taken from the morning liturgy.

25. The text alludes to M. Avot 3:18 and its apposite subject matter: "R. Eleazar b. Hisma said: [Rules concerning] bird-offerings and the purification of menstruating women are the essential *halakhot*; astronomy and geometry are ancillary to wisdom."

Sages? In fact, we see that almost all the exegetes did not refrain from engaging in these matters, and some even delved deeply into them, such as R. Samuel b. Meir,[26] R. Abraham Ibn Ezra, R. Elijah Mizrahi,[27] etc. The author of *Middot Aharon*[28] composed a commentary on the thirteen hermeneutical principles, its contents filled with the principles of logic. This should suffice to remove any objections from the contribution that I have placed before you today.

Maimonides only set out to explain the terms used by practitioners of the art of logic, and therefore he called this small book *Be'ur Millot ha-Higgayon*.[29] This book has already been published four times, with two commentaries: in Cremona in the year 1500, Basel in 1527, and twice in Venice—1550 and 1567.[30] However, those commentators did not understand Maimonides' words at all; they hardly had any knowledge of the art of logic. In 1761[31] the Torah scholar and doctor R. Samson Kalir urged me to write a brief commentary on Maimonides' work, which I did, and which he subsequently published in Frankfurt an Oder.[32] That printing contained innumerable errors, and the commentary was also inadequate for beginners due to its brevity. I therefore expanded that work in order to help intelligent individuals who were not used to traversing these paths. Where Maimonides himself was too concise, I supplemented his words so that one who yearns for this kind of knowledge will not need to seek it from the books of gentile scholars. And you, the reader, *take my offering which I brought to you* today (Gen. 33:11). And if I have erred, *the good Lord will provide*

26. Although Rashbam lived in northern France and was not schooled in Greco-Arabic philosophical traditions and the study of logical terms, Mendelssohn singled out his commentary for internalizing the substance if not the form of logical modes of reasoning and articulation.

27. In his preface to the 1784 edition, Jaroslav pointed to Mizrahi's comments on Genesis 13:16 and its apparent use of a hypothetical syllogism as an example of its importance in traditional learning. Jaroslav explained the logical analysis and presuppositions that went into R. Mizrahi's comment in some detail in the 1790/91 edition. See *JubA*, 14:305, 312–13.

28. R. Aaron Ibn Hayyim (1545–1632) was a Moroccan scholar who wrote a commentary on Sifra titled *Qorban Aharon* and published in Venice in 1609. This volume began with an extended discussion of the Beraita of R. Ishmael under the heading *Midot Aharon* that elucidated the classical hermeneutical devices employed in rabbinic literature. Ibn Hayyim's commentary came to be widely studied with Sifra, but Mendelssohn might have been familiar with it on account of its reprinting in 1742 in his hometown, Dessau.

29. None of the printed editions of Maimonides' treatise that Mendelssohn had before him used this title; rather, they appeared as *Millot ha-Higgayon*, or in one instance, *Ha-Higgayon*.

30. There were, in fact, only three printed editions that appeared before the eighteenth century: Basel 1527, Venice 1550, and Cremona 1566. The same error appears in the Kalir edition, and seems to be based upon the confused presentation of the *Bibliotheca Hebraea* of Johann Christoph Wolf, a four-volume magisterial bibliographical survey of all Jewish literature. The earlier commentaries to Maimonides' treatise referred to here were published anonymously.

31. The Hebrew date was given as 5522; the book was published in autumn 1761 after the Jewish new year.

32. See the editors' introduction.

atonement for my errors (2 Chron. 30:18) and will light up my paths. *Peace unto you* (1 Sam. 25:6).

MAIMONIDES' INTRODUCTION

Said our Master Moses, son of the Honorable Rabbi, our Master Maimon, may the memory of the righteous be a blessing: An eminent person, a master of legal studies who also possessed eloquence and fluency in the Arabic language, asked an individual who had studied the art of logic to explain the terms frequently mentioned in that art, and to explain to him the conventions[a] adopted[b] by practitioners of this art, with the aim of doing so briefly and without repetition,[c] lest it be too long. For his intention was not to increase his glory by learning this art from what will be told to him;[d] for many are the preliminaries that lie before an individual who wants to learn this art. Rather, his intention was to know their conventions according to their main borrowed meanings[e] and nothing else. Now I will begin to present that which was desired.

Mendelssohn's Commentary

[a] conventions: in matters relating to clarity and language, as well as the explanations of terms utilized by scholars, we need only consider that which was agreed by those who established the language.

[b] adopted: °(*willkürlich übereingekommen*),[33] for in truth, even though Hebrew refers to things with the word appropriate to it and consistent with its nature, and is *the* authentic language as the author of the *Kuzari* wrote,[34] nevertheless, with regard to the art of logic we should only proceed according to convention.

[c] repetition: like those who emulated Aristotle's commentators who went on at great length, wearying the reader with endless verbosity.

[d] from what will be told to him: [i.e.,] of the weighty theory of that art. Since he exerts himself exclusively in legal studies, he does not seek to enhance his honor

33. I.e., arbitrarily agreed.

34. *Kuzari* IV:25. Mendelssohn referred to the same passage in section 2 of *Qohelet Musar*; see above, pp. 28–29. The phrase *leshon ha-ʾamiti* ("authentic language") was Mendelssohn's own formulation.

with the art of logic, but only to know and understand the terms utilized by masters of that art.

[e] main borrowed meanings: of necessity, masters of logic use borrowed words, as per their agreed usage, since those who established the language would not have taken into consideration the need to invent distinct words for the art of logic.

Chapter 1

MENDELSSOHN'S PREFACE

The purpose of the art of logic, as Maimonides mentioned at the end of the treatise, is to guide the rational soul and to train it to distinguish between truth and falsehood. Toward this end, you should exert yourself and be diligently attentive to the thoughts as well as the words of other people, until your thoughts be [properly] guided °(this being the transformations of the inner soul and its notions, which are the perceptions and intelligible propositions, the dreams, passing thoughts and imaginings, all of which are attributed to the cogitative faculty), which scholars call internal speech. [Such attention] will also perfect external speech °(this being the vocal articulation that a person voices with his lips and utters what he has in mind, in order that the intelligent individual apprehend the ways of [proper] thinking and syllogism and how to deduce one idea from another, and will learn to arrange his words properly) so that the listener will fully understand what is in the mind of the speaker without addition or omission.

Thoughts are either perceptions created by the senses without recourse to rational judgment, such as hearing a voice, seeing a color, or feeling an object °(and the feeling of hunger, thirst, pain, pleasure, and the like, by which the living soul functions, sensing changes to the body and its accidents through the senses alone, without recourse to reason or intellect). Or [thoughts are formed] with the addition of reason and the combination of two such sense perceptions, such that one says, for example, that a violin makes a sound, the raven is black, or that the violin makes no sound, and the like. As such, you will find in every proposition at least two items, these being the two sense perceptions that are combined or made distinct in your thinking, as for example the raven and blackness, the violin and sound, and other such things. The word with which you began a statement, as in our example the violin or the raven or other such

things, is called by the Arabic grammarian the beginning of speech, and by the logician the subject. That which you attributed to this beginning, as in our example the production of sound, or blackness, is called by the Arabic grammarian information regarding the beginning, and by the logician, the predicate. [In the chapters that follow,] Maimonides proceeds to explain these terms.

Chapter 8

MENDELSSOHN'S PREFACE

We know from what Maimonides said earlier that intelligibles[1] are proven by demonstration; the demonstration is composed of different syllogisms, and the syllogism is composed of three propositions: the conclusion is the proposition that we seek to prove, and the [two] premises are propositions that are evident to us and by means of which the unknown becomes known. It must therefore be the case that there are premises that are self-evident and do not require demonstration or proof regarding their veracity, for if you posit that all propositions can only be proven by means of a syllogism, I could ask you how the premises of that syllogism would be proven; and if you respond [that those premises are proven] by means of another syllogism, I could repeat my question a second and third time. Since one cannot continue this regress ad infinitum, we must perforce arrive at propositions that are self-evident and manifest without the slightest doubt, which no intelligent person would question. In this chapter, Maimonides explains these kinds of propositions.

MAIMONIDES

[I] The propositions that are known to be true and require no proof for their veracity are of four kinds: sense perceptions,[a] as when we know that this is black or white, and that is sweet or bitter; first intelligibles,[b] as when we know that the whole is greater than the part, that two is an even number,[c] and that things that are in themselves[2] equal to something else are equal to each other;[d] generally accepted opinions,[e] as

1. *muskalim*.

2. The text here generally follows the Venice and Cremona editions (see Mendelssohn's introduction) but shifts the singular *be-ʿaṣmo be-ʿeno* to the plural *be-ʿaṣmam be-ʿenam*.

when we know that uncovering the privy parts is repugnant, and that compensating a benefactor generously is agreeable and proper; and traditions,[f] namely, whatever is received from one or many notables. For we seek proof regarding the trustworthiness of an individual from whom we receive [a proposition] only generally, rather than seeking proof for each and every statement. We rely wholly on such tradition as relayed from him,[g] for his trustworthiness has already been made clear in general.

Commentary

[a] sense perceptions: these are the sensations that are generated within us by means of the senses, whose number is known—seeing, hearing, smelling, tasting, and touching. All of them [function] by sensing some kind of motion. In seeing, one senses the rays of light emanating from an illuminating body or reflected from an opaque body into the eye by generating movement in the optic nerve that goes from there to the brain. With hearing, one feels the vibrations of the air that are set off by striking a hard and resonating object against a similar object, for the vibrating air enters the ear and generates a vibration in the aural nerves whose roots are in the brain. Smell is the sensation of the movement generated by the olfactory nerves when they are stimulated by fragrant vapors that are given off by a fragrant body and reach the nose; and likewise with taste and touch. Living organisms also contain parts that are devoid of sensations in themselves, such as hair, nails, bones, horns, and hooves. Recent scientists have enumerated many more such parts [of the body] devoid of sensation, for a living thing cannot experience sensations without sinews called *nerven*, which are rooted in the brain and distributed throughout most of the body. Some recent scientists say that the brain itself cannot feel any sensations and experimentation supports this, but there is room to cast doubt on their claims. However, where there are no nerves extending from the brain, you will undoubtedly find no sensation whatsoever.[3]

All these sensible perceptions indicate the presence of an external body that is sensed and that generates that movement, [although] sometimes the soul perceives such sensations without the presence of any sensed object, as for example when you represent a tree or fruit or person seen earlier but now absent. These are referred to as perceptions of the imagination. They originated as sensible perceptions produced while the sensed object was in front of you, but once re-

3. The question of whether some parts of the brain were insensitive to stimulation was addressed by the noted eighteenth-century Swiss physiologist Albrecht von Haller in *De partibus corporis humani sensilibus et irritabilibus* (Göttingen, 1752); Mendelssohn was seemingly referring to this work or the debate over these findings.

moved, they become images. Dreams are similar, in that all natural dreams are the daytime thoughts and ideas of someone who is awake and that accompany him to bed and appear to him as if they were perceived there.[4] Moreover, you have other sensations that are not attributable to any sensed object outside the body, such as hunger and thirst, sexual desire, pain and pleasure. These are also rooted in movements generated in the sentient body be it the stomach or another of the living organs, and as such, are attached to the nerves mentioned above, as is explained in the natural sciences. We also have mental sensations whose source is the sentient soul;[5] they have no relation to the body, its nerves and their movements, as for example the inner sentiment that I exist, speak, know, and remember, that I love or hate, feel compassion or disdain, that I am happy or sad, hopeful or despondent. All these are internal sensations that have no external sensed object.

Maimonides stated that none of these sensations are in need of proof or demonstration. This requires further reflection given that earlier scholars disagreed as to whether or not what the senses testified to was correct and real. The adherents of Kalam[6] argued that the senses do not always yield the truth, as Maimonides himself noted in *Guide* I:73.[7] In truth, we well understand that the senses are highly susceptible to error: to someone sitting on a ship, it appears that the ship is standing still and the coast is moving backwards, or it appears to us that the sun is much smaller than the earth, and that the moon is an illuminating body and that it is no closer to the earth than the sun and other planets. Errors with regard to vision are notorious, for one afflicted with jaundice sees everything with yellow in it, and we likewise do not recognize and distinguish things seen by candlelight as well as we do in daylight. The same is true with taste and with the other senses, which are too numerous to mention. If so, how shall we rely upon such suspect attestations and say that they do not require further proof, for in what we saw above, even Maimonides does not disagree with the adherents of Kalam. And although recent scholars have found trustworthy ways to guard against errors of the senses, how could we state that [the senses] would not be in need of any proof or demonstration, seeing that so many disagree with them?

Upon reflection you will see that all these reservations are only from the standpoint of the sensed object in that it sometimes differs from what the senses report, with the result that one relying on sensory information with regard to

4. See Ber. 55b and Rashi ad loc.

5. *nefesh ha-margeshet*; cf. *ʿIqqarim* II:31, where this term is used to describe a human faculty that yields both the senses and other mental powers, including that of imagination.

6. *ha-medabberim*, the Tibbonite Hebrew term for the Mutakallimun, a theological movement that began in the eighth and ninth centuries. Maimonides devoted considerable attention to their arguments, and like other Aristotelians considered them to be sophists and not philosophers.

7. See the discussion of the twelfth premise.

external objects is not protected against error and confusion. However, from the standpoint of the senses themselves, they should surely occasion no doubt as to whether we sense something or not. Not even an obstinate person would doubt this. For example, it will appear to the person on the ship that we mentioned that the coast is moving backwards, which is not true regarding the thing being perceived, namely the coast. But it is true without doubt regarding the sensation itself, and we should not doubt its truth as to whether it appears to us this way or not. And if someone who is ill tastes a sweet thing as bitter and says that the thing [itself] is bitter, he is mistaken; but if he says "I taste something bitter," he is correct and will not require further proof or demonstration. It suffices for him to say "this is how I sense it." And so, we already have propositions that are clear and proven true in themselves without demonstration and syllogism, and in combination with other propositions, they will yield their conclusions. This suffices for Maimonides' purposes, for his intention in this chapter was to find true propositions that would not need demonstration, to ensure that the need for such proof and demonstration would not go on endlessly.

[b] first intelligibles: one who considers works of Geometry, like those of Euclid, Archimedes, and the like, will see that they did not build the structure of their proofs on the basis of sense perceptions but on definitions and first intelligibles. Definitions are statements by which we clarify the quality of things and their essential properties. For example, the definition of man is that he is a living being endowed with reason; the definition of a triangle is space that is enclosed by three lines; the definition of a circle is a curved line produced by the movement of a straight line around a fixed point; and other such examples. First intelligibles are propositions that are not susceptible to doubt and are absolutely impossible to contradict, as for example [the notion] that the whole is greater than the part, etc., where as soon as one understands the meaning of the word "the whole is greater than the part" it is impossible to doubt the truth of the proposition; it therefore does not require demonstration. In the books of Euclid and Archimedes they are called postulates.[8]

Know that even though we need neither proof nor demonstration to ascertain the truth of first intelligibles, it is nevertheless possible to elucidate them with correct demonstration, since they are in truth the conclusion of definitions as mentioned, and the definitions serve as their premises. For example, with regard to the first intelligible that the whole is greater than the part: if you consider the definition of each and every word, you will discover a means of demonstra-

8. *hanaḥot*. Euclid, however, referred to such propositions as "common notions" and not "postulates." Mendelssohn appears to be using the term *hanaḥot* broadly to include "first intelligibles," "axioms," and "postulates" without distinguishing between them. Our thanks to Zev Harvey for this note.

tion that renders this notion true. This is because the definition of "whole" is one [unit] composed of many, and those many [units] are parts of the whole. By way of example, A, B, C, D, etc., grouped together constitute a whole, and each one is a part. We can state that E is equal to H if E and H are interchangeable without changing the quantity; and if part of E may be exchanged for all of H without changes to quantity, then we should say that E is larger than H. The explanation of the terms "greater" or "smaller" is the proportional relationship between two things where a part of one is equal in quantity to all of the other. As such, with regard to each part of A, B, C, D, etc., above, let us take the example of C. Let us say that C is equal to a part of the whole, and anything equal to a part of the whole is smaller than the whole. Therefore, C is smaller than the whole, and this is true for the other parts. This is a direct proof.[9] The minor premise is clear, for we have already proposed that C is a part of the whole, and the major premise is also incontrovertible in that it defines the proportional relationship between greater and smaller as we have mentioned.[10]

[c] that two is an even number: this is not a postulate, but a definition, and I am surprised that Maimonides included definitions among postulates.[11]

[d] equal to each other: that is to say, if you know that an object A is equal to B, and that C is also equal to B, then it is absolutely incontrovertible that A is also equal to C. If you consider this, you will find that this intelligible also has a demonstration: since A is equal to B, everything can be replaced with its equal without changing the quantity °(for this is the definition of equal, as we mentioned), and therefore A can be exchanged for B without a change of quantity. Since C is equal to B, taking B and inserting A in its place will not result in a change of quantity, and so C is equal to A, which is what we set out to explain.

[e] generally accepted opinions: things not subject to [judgments of] falsehood or truth, but [whether it be] agreeable or repugnant; and this applies not to all generally accepted opinions of what is agreeable or repugnant, but only those pertaining to moral habits, namely the emotions generated in a person's heart in seeing things that are beneficial and not harmful to society and the perfection of the species as a whole. Examples of this would include injury and justice, exploitation, acts of kindness or that which impedes it, compassion and cruelty. The

9. The text used the technical term for a direct categorical syllogism, but Mendelssohn had translated this (in ch. 7) as *direkter Beweis*.

10. Mendelssohn is here following Wolff's lead in elucidating the definitions and axioms that Euclid had treated as self-evident. See *Vernünftige Gedanken von den Kräfften des menschlichen Verstandes, und ihrem richtigen Gebrauche in Erkäntniss der Wahrheit* (Halle, 1738), 27–28.

11. While Mendelssohn used the terms "first intelligibles" and "postulates" synonymously, it is possible that Maimonides considered this proposition to be a first intelligible but not a postulate.

Eternal God created the world for habitation and not waste,[12] and implanted in man's heart the ability to be moved by pleasant, sweet, and appropriate sentiments when he sees justice and righteousness, kindness and compassion and the like; and to sense pain—like the piercing of a sword—when he sees injury, contention, and the exploitation of people. Although it is surely possible to demonstrate that these things can somewhat help or harm the social order, it was open and clear divine intent that the human heart be roused and feel pleasure and repugnance before the intellect examines the good and the bad, the true and the false. Immediately upon seeing *two men fighting* (Ex. 2:13), one beating the other *for no injury* (Job 16:17), he will become angry and *say to the offender, "why do you strike your fellow"* (Ex. 2:13). Sometimes *he will take his life in his hands* (1 Sam. 19:5) to *rescue* the oppressed *from the hand of his oppressor* (Jer. 21:12).

These propositions, [indicating] this as agreeable and that as repugnant, are called generally accepted opinions since they were agreed upon by everyone as matters between fellow men, insofar as they are not affected by it. For if [such an opinion or agreement] brings [personal] harm or benefit, they may side with lawlessness and turn away from justice for their [own] physical and material well-being. However, regarding those matters that affect someone else, one would certainly gain pleasure from justice and feel repugnance for injury. With regard to this, they say that generally accepted opinions require no proof.

[f] traditions: these are the things that are verified by a trusted individual or many trusted individuals who are not subject to doubt, as in [the rabbinic dictum] "Moses received the Torah at Sinai and transmitted it to Joshua, etc."[13] We believe in the Oral Torah on account of tradition, since we received from a succession of individuals, one trustworthy person from another [extending back] to Moses, that this is the Torah given to him at Sinai, [and] these are the principles by which it is interpreted. We likewise believe that in ancient times there was a King Alexander, the son of Philip and a student of Aristotle, who conquered and subjugated many countries—we believe all this from one who received it from trustworthy individuals or from their writings.

You the reader should know [with regard to] all absolute propositions:[14] were something to take place in the present, it would be verified for us by our sense perceptions, as for example the giving of the Torah at that chosen occasion, [where] our forefathers *felt* and heard *the thunder and the flames of fire* (Ex. 20:15); or with reference to the Sea of Reeds, where they saw the *mighty power*

12. Alluding to Isa. 45:18: ". . . [God] did not create it a waste, but formed it for habitation."

13. M. Avot 1:1.

14. The text included a reference to ch. 4 of *Millot ha-Higgayon* where absolute propositions, e.g., "Ezra is writing," were discussed.

and believed in the Eternal and his servant Moses (Ex. 14:31). However, if it happened in the past, it can only be verified for us with respect to tradition.

It is a great mistake and egregious error to seek demonstration or direct proof[15] for the truth of any absolute proposition pertaining to the past, for by what means shall our children or their children verify that King Friedrich II waged a great many mighty battles and that he was the most glorious of kings?[16] Nevertheless, they will not doubt it and will rely upon what they inherited from their forefathers, be it oral or written.[17] The same is true with regard to belief in miracles. Anyone seeking decisive demonstration of their truth is mistaken, for a demonstration cannot apply to a past event. If we believe that there was in antiquity a noble and powerful Roman Empire, given that it was widely known to everyone in those days and is known to us from many people—some reliable and some less so—how much more so we believe in the signs and wonders that were done on behalf of our forefathers with great fanfare and before a mass of people, and made known to us by trustworthy individuals and prophets and devoted servants of God—lovers of truth and despisers of falsehood. I will not expatiate on this matter, since this is not the appropriate place.

[g] as relayed from him: that is to say, after you have completed your investigation of an individual's trustworthiness and his general reliability, you should not specifically investigate each and every statement of his to see if it is true or not; rather, you will rely on tradition.

MAIMONIDES

[II] As to sense perceptions and intelligibles, there is no difference between someone with naturally sound senses and another among the human species,[h] and [between] the notable and lesser among them.[18] But with regard to generally accepted opinions there is distinction and advantage, for there are propositions that became generally accepted among one nation and not among another;[i] and the more the matter is known among many nations the stronger its trustworthiness. Likewise traditions: a tradition among one nation may be absent in another. Whatever is perceived with a sound[j] sense—all that is obtained

15. See above n. 9.

16. The reference was to the reigning Prussian monarch, Friedrich II (1712–86), and the Seven Years' War (1756–1763) that had just ended.

17. *im mi-pihem im mi-pi ḳetavam*, alluding to a rabbinic principle regarding testimony (*mi-pihem ve-lo mi-pi ḳetavam*) stating that witnesses may not testify from written notes. See Sifre to Deut. 19:15, § 188, and Giṭṭ. 71a.

18. Mendelssohn rendered the last phrase, which had become corrupted in earlier editions, as: *ve-ha-nikhbad ba-hem ve-ha-paḥot ba-hem*.

from it is true without doubt.(*) The same applies to all intelligibles, primary as well as secondary intelligibles; by secondary intelligibles[k] I mean geometric theorems(†) and astronomic calculations, which are all true because they may be demonstrated by premises most of which come close to primary intelligibles. Similarly, all that is determined with experience,[l] e.g., that scammony is a purgative and gallnut causes constipation, are also true. Whatever becomes known through any of these ways[19] are true, and logicians call the propositions that are obtained with one of these three ways apodictic [propositions].

Commentary

[h] Human species: that is to say, one should not differentiate between the veracity of something sensed by an individual whose senses are more sound, and the veracity of something sensed by an average person, as long as his senses are healthy and not deficient. The perceptions of a notable human being are not to be differentiated from those of lesser individuals, for the truth of both are equal without distinction or advantage.

[i] another [nation]: for example [the difference] between governance by a monarch or many ministers. There are nations that would view as repugnant governance by one ruler, and those that would view as repugnant a land where its ministers are many.

[j] sound [sense]: this does not contradict what Maimonides said above, [namely] that there is no difference between one who has sound senses and another who does not, because above[20] he was addressing the virtues and perfection of the senses with respect to their refinement and the power of their perceptions. [In that context] someone with sound senses is *der die volkommenste Sinne hat* [one who has the most perfect senses], but here, sound would be rendered in German as *ganze* [whole, entire] and a sound sense would be *ein Sinn, der ganz ist*, healthy without deficiency or incapacity. In fact, the refinement of the senses and their ability to discern will not yield a distinction or advantage in the veracity of their perceptions. However, concerning their health or incapacity there is no doubt that there would be a significant distinction with regard to their veracity, for someone afflicted with jaundice sees everything as yellow, and someone whose bile has been spilt will taste something sweet as bitter; in these instances, the sense would not yield truth.

19. That is, through either perceptions, intelligibles, or experience.

20. The 1765 edition has *le-ma'aseh* (in actuality, in fact), while the 1784 edition has *le-ma'alah*, as rendered here.

(*) without doubt: Maimonides here reveals his thinking on the subject of the reliability of the senses in opposition to the adherents of Kalam, who contend that the senses will be mistaken in what they apprehend. Maimonides thinks that something obtained from a healthy sense that is not deficient is true without doubt. However, when you reflect upon this properly, you will see that the perfection of the sense alone is not enough to render what it apprehends to be true without doubt. Rather, you will need other conditions: for example, that the sensible [object] be well placed;[21] that the person apprehending it be properly positioned; and that there be no obstruction or another item between the observer and the object to confound the sense and what it apprehends. In the absence of these [conditions], one cannot guard against error. In *Guide* I:73, premise twelve, Maimonides himself mentioned errors of the senses that cannot be improved with the perfection of the sense alone. For a man with perfect eyesight, for example, might see something large as small and a sharp object as rounder; or he will see something small as large, if it is [immersed] in water, or something large as small if it is partly submerged and partly out of the water, and other mistakes of this kind that he mentioned. Therefore, one who wants to rely upon the apprehension of the senses must safeguard the mind against all manner of mistakes that we have mentioned. We may derive the premises of demonstration from the senses in the manner mentioned above, namely, that we rely not on what they tell us with regard to an external sensed object, but rather in relation to the sentient apprehension itself. The investigation of this is exceedingly weighty, and I do not want to expatiate.

[k] secondary intelligibles: propositions that are derived from primary intelligibles by means of true syllogisms.

(†) geometric theorems [*temunot ha-handesim*]: *handasiyah* is an Arabic word denoting the science of geometry or measurement, while astronomic calculations are the calculations by which we know the movement of the sun, the moon, and the stars. All these deductions are attained by means of categorical syllogisms whose principles are derived from primary intelligibles, such that even the most obscure deduction of Euclid and Archimedes is not subject to doubt, just as the veracity of the [underlying] primary intelligible is not subject to doubt. This is because geometrical deductions are intimately connected to one another like the links of a chain and their foundation extending to primary intelligibles, such that the negation of one of the geometrical deductions must negate them all.

[l] experience: when one reflects by means of his senses upon the natural working of things and sees that individual members of a known species always perform

21. What Mendelssohn presumably means is that the object has to be positioned so that it can be properly seen.

in the same way—for example, that wine causes happiness, that fire burns, that a certain plant is a purgative, and the like—we may then say that a certain proposition is proven by experience, which in German we call *Erfahrungen* °(*Experienz*). There are two kinds of experience. A proposition can sometimes be proven for us by reflection and scrutiny of natural things alone, without adding or detracting from it, such as the observation of planetary motion, the ways of Providence, ethical behavior, and similar things. This is called observation °(*Beobachtung*, *observatio*). At other times one would need to introduce a volitional action to the natural working of things—to add and detract from them or to change their setting, to combine or separate them, and the like—in order to determine the veracity of some inquiry. This would include the preparation of plants for medicine or the creation of a vacuum as per recent scientists, seeking to determine many occurrences which nature brings about through the medium of air. This is referred to as a particular kind of experience, in German *Versuch*, *Experiment*.

MAIMONIDES

[III] After these preliminaries you should know that every syllogism whose two premises are true is what we call a demonstrative syllogism; and forming such syllogisms and a knowledge of their conditions constitute the art of demonstration. When one or both premises of the syllogism belong to generally accepted opinions, we call it a dialectical[m] syllogism, and forming such syllogisms and a knowledge of their conditions constitute the art of dialectics. When one or both premises of the syllogism are drawn from traditions, we call it a rhetorical[n] syllogism; and forming such syllogisms and a knowledge of their conditions constitute the art of rhetoric. There is another kind of syllogism that makes use of deception and falsehood, syllogisms in which one or both premises either are used erroneously or are themselves erroneous, or where one of the syllogistic forms is falsified; such syllogisms are called sophistic[o] syllogisms, and the means by which people mislead and falsify is called the art of sophism.[22] Making the words more attractive or repugnant by means of the imagination and similarity to other things,[p] and every syllogism that makes use of a premise regarding the imaginative and the imitative, we call a poetic syllogism, and the art that deals with such syllogisms and explains the way in which the imitative and the parabolic is formed is called the art of poetry.

22. The text of *Millot ha-Higgayon* concerning sophistic syllogisms printed in this edition differed from all earlier printed editions; it clarified a difficult text without altering the meaning or substance.

Commentary

[m] dialectical syllogism: this is not a demonstrative method, for not all that is agreeable and appealing is good, and not all good is appealing and agreeable. Likewise, not all bad is abominable and repugnant, although everything repugnant is bad.[23] Even if most people agree on a certain matter, this is no demonstration of its veracity. We find generally accepted opinions in one nation or one faction of society that are not accepted by others, as Maimonides mentioned above. Even though God, may He be blessed, imbued the human soul with a love of virtuous moral qualities and upright conduct, the opinions of men still diverge on account of the temperament, education, religion, and other variables too numerous to mention. As such, premises that are in themselves generally accepted opinions are not demonstrative. They may, however, draw people to acknowledge[24] what is desirable and to accept it calmly and without confusion. Despite all this, the possibility of contradiction remains.

[n] rhetorical syllogism: this too is not a demonstrative method, but it suffices to plant belief in the heart of the listener. Using statements and syllogisms of this kind, orators seek to motivate people to do something or to steer them away from it, or to instill in their hearts the love of something in order to be drawn to it or hatred so that they may be distanced from it.

[o] sophistic syllogisms: these are of two kinds. In one, the deceptive premises appear, on their face, to be true, but when an intelligent individual considers them he will find one or both to be false. In the second kind, the premises are true but incorrectly joined in such a way that a conclusion cannot be [properly] drawn, and anyone who has not considered this closely or has not mastered all the conditions of a syllogism will be deceived. The first kind is considered deceptive in the substance of the syllogism, while the second is deceptive in its form. An example of a substantive deception is the statement that all living things have five senses; a lizard is a living creature, therefore it has five senses, which is false because the major premise is untrue. If you form a syllogism by stating that all men are sentient; the eagle is sentient; therefore the eagle is a man, the deception is in the form of the syllogism, since the predicate of the major premise is itself the predicate of the minor premise,[25] and this syllogism belongs to the second form. From that earlier discussion,[26] you know

23. The last clause follows the 1765 edition in reading the first word as *ela'*; the 1784 edition has *ve-lo'*, such that the text should read "and not all that is repugnant is bad."

24. The translation here follows the 1765 edition, which has *lehodot*; the 1784 edition has *lehagi'a*, to attain.

25. That is, both men and the eagle are said to be sentient.

26. The terms used here had been explained in ch. 7, where Maimonides laid out the Aristotelian classification of syllogisms into three different forms.

that in the second form, the minor premise must always be the opposite of the major premise in quality;[27] but if both [premises] negate [the same predicate] or both affirm [the same predicate], then nothing can be concluded.

[p] other things: that is, the proposition will sometimes be untrue in itself and according to its straightforward meaning, but it serves to embellish or demean something, as for example *my teaching drips like rain* (Deut. 32:2), where [Scripture] compares teaching to rain in order to embellish his words, and the orator formed a syllogism by adding *like showers on green vegetation* (ibid.). This is a poetic syllogism.

MAIMONIDES

[IV] Know that there are conditions of demonstrative syllogisms that have not been mentioned in this treatise. But to address them generally,[28] I would say that the demonstrative syllogisms do not use analogies under any circumstance, nor induction except under certain conditions. However, the art of dialectics does make use of generalized induction;[q] and the art of rhetoric makes use of the analogical syllogism.[r] You will also find with regard to rhetorical syllogisms that one premise may appear while the other is concealed for various reasons;[s] we call this an enthymeme.

In sum, these are the seventeen terms explained in this chapter: [1] sense perceptions, [2] first intelligibles, [3] secondary intelligibles, [4] generally accepted opinions, [5] traditions, [6] apodictic proposition, [7] demonstrative syllogism, [8] the art of demonstration, [9] the dialectical syllogism, [10] rhetorical syllogism, [11] sophistic syllogism, [12] the art of sophism, [13] poetic syllogism, [14] the art of poetry, [15] enthymeme.[29]

Commentary

[q] generalized induction: this was explained above in chapter seven.[30] Since one or more of the premises of the art of dialectic are generally accepted opinions,

27. That is, if one is in the affirmative, the other must be in the negative.

28. Once again, the text here reflects Mendelssohn's efforts to edit in the interest of clarity.

29. Although the text indicates that it will list seventeen terms, the omission of *mele'khet ha-niṣuaḥ* (the art of dialectics) and *mele'khet ha-halaṣah* (the art of rhetoric) follows the Basel and Venice/Cremona editions. Both, however, appear in Maimonides' discussion in the preceding paragraph.

30. Maimonides explained inductive syllogism as follows: "When there is a certain proposition whose particulars you have examined and some of them have proven to be inductively true, we may take this proposition as a universal and posit it as a premise of a syllogism."

one is already forming a syllogism [based upon] what most people accept as verification of something applicable to everyone, since an inductive investigation of them all is impossible. This is an inductive syllogism.

[r] analogical syllogism: its explanation is in chapter seven. For the art of rhetoric makes use of traditions, and the truth of something received by tradition will not be evident to all peoples nor to their majority, but only to some individuals. [°](It is the manner of orators to spur people by saying "do such and such as so-and-so did successfully," or "do as the honored so-and-so ordered," or "beware of doing such and such, for so-and-so was not careful in this regard and paid the price." This is the usual manner of orators who spur the nation or the ruler to war or peace, to build or destroy, to disperse or gather the dispersed, as is known. Sometimes they will try to validate their words by means of an analogy, and all these ways make use of analogical syllogism.)

[s] various reasons: that is to say, the person forming the rhetorical syllogism will occasionally conceal one of the premises of the syllogism and will mention only the other one, either out of a love of brevity or some other reason. For example, if we were to say that a man is a living being and therefore sentient, but we concealed the major premise that all living things are sentient; or if we say that all Jews have a portion in the world-to-come, and this Reuben has a portion in the world-to-come, but you neglect to mention the minor premise that Reuben is Jewish. This is the usual manner of all writers of books other than books of logic, for anyone reading with even minimal attention will understand the hidden premise by himself without the need to have it specifically mentioned. Orators use this method constantly, for their intent is to arouse the soul of the listener or reader; they therefore leave room for the play of his intelligence by not writing at undue length.

[1] sense perceptions: in the vernacular, *sinnliche Empfindungen*, *sensationis*. [2] first intelligibles: *Grund- und Heischsätze, axiomata*. [3] secondary intelligibles: *erweisliche Sätze*, *propositionis demonstrabilis*. [4] generally accepted opinions: *das Anständige und Unanständige*, *decorum*, conveniens. [5] traditions: *das auf Glauben Angenommene*, *auctoritate verum*. [6] apodictic proposition: *wahrer Satz*, *judicium verum*. [7] demonstrative syllogism: *demonstrativir Schluß*, *syllogismus demonstrativus*. [8] art of demonstration: *Beweiskunst*, *demonstratio*. [9] dialectical syllogism: *ein Schluß durch die Beschämung*, *syllogismus ex convenientia*. [10] rhetorical syllogism: *ein Schluß durch die Autorität*, *ex auctoritate*. [11] sophistic syllogism: *ein sophisma*, *oder Trugschluß*. [12] art of sophism: *Sophisterei*, *ars sophistica*. [13] poetic syllogism: *poetischer Schluß*, *syllogismus poeticus*. [14] art of poetry: *Poesie*, *ars poetica*. [15] enthymeme: *abgekürzter Schluß*, *enthymema*.

Chapter 11

MAIMONIDES

[I] Anything found to be [inexorably] connected with some item, such as the falling of a dropped stone, or the certain death of an animal when it is slaughtered, we say is by virtue of its essence.[a] Likewise, it can be said that something that is found [to be connected with an item] most of the time is also by virtue of its essence, as when we say that every man has five fingers, even though we may find a man with six fingers. Similarly, it can also be said that something that usually takes place at a point in time, like cold in the winter and heat in the summer, is by virtue of its essence. In general, when something occurs to any natural phenomenon most of the time it is by virtue of its essence; but when something is found in a few instances, it is said to occur by virtue of an accident,[b] like a man digging a foundation and finding a treasure. In general, we can say with regard to all accidental matters that are not intended, whether brought about by man or by something other than man,[c] that they are by virtue of an accident. This is the notion of essential and accidental.

Commentary

[a] by virtue of its essence: After you have seen and understood the nature of universals and their differentia,[1] know and discern another aspect, namely, that there are universals that imply one another with absolute necessity, to the point that if you posit notions that have implications, it is impossible not to grant the things that are implied. For example, a geometric figure of three sides entails

1. Mendelssohn is referring to the subject of ch. 10, wherein Maimonides introduced the distinction between genus, species, and particulars.

three angles, and vice versa, [a figure of] three angles entails three sides. Likewise, all the properties of geometric forms are implied from the positing of some universals; that postulation is termed a definition, and the properties that follow are called theorems, and they too are universals. For example, the definition of a triangle[2] is an area bound by three straight lines, and it follows necessarily that its angles are equal to one hundred and eighty degrees,[3] and that the measurement of its area is equal to half the area of the square whose base and height are equal to the base and height of the triangle. From this it necessarily follows that if the base and height of two triangles are equal, then their areas are equal, and that the relation of the measurement of two triangles is comprised of the relation of their base and height. If you wanted, you could say that the definition of a triangle is that of an area bound by straight lines, and that its area is half of a square that shares its base and reaches its top; you would necessarily determine from this that a triangle is an area bound by three straight lines and that its angles are equal to one hundred and eighty degrees, etc.

From this you will know that there are universals that necessitate other notions and those necessarily consequent upon them, each being reducible to the other, as I demonstrated with the properties of triangles. The same applies to other matters, as for example the [statement] that the human soul is an essence that is sentient and apprehends; this necessarily implies that it is not comprised of parts and has no spatial dimension; that it has neither appearance nor form, and that it is a distinct essence that is not liable to division or decay; that it has choice and will, that it loves and hates, desires and abhors; that it can be covetous and repulsive, wrathful and merciful, etc. And if you posit that the human soul is an essence endowed with choice and will, you would necessarily determine that it is sentient and apprehends, not composed of parts, etc.

As such, universals that give rise to certain notions from which all the properties of a thing are necessarily drawn is referred to as the essence °(*Wesen*) of the thing and its verity, because they made it what it is and constitute that thing; and if you can imagine their absence, the thing would not be what it is. The things that necessarily follow from them are called "by virtue of its essence" °(*wesentlich*), for they are necessary by dint of the essence of the thing and are referred to as its attributes °(*Eigenschaften*). Accidental things are properties that do not necessarily follow from the essence of the thing as an absolute necessity, but may be present or absent, as when the area of a triangle is white or black, or when a person is sleeping, falling asleep, or awake, and other such things. All these are called accidents for they do not necessarily follow from the essence of the thing with absolute necessity, but may or may not be present.

2. *meshulash ha-yashar*; Mendelssohn seems to have used this term to distinguish a plane triangle from the curved surface of a conus, i.e., a spherical triangle.

3. *shete niṣavot*, that is, two right angles.

Since, with regard to the existence of natural composite things, we know nothing of what inheres in them and cannot apprehend or ascertain them except their actions that act on the senses by means of movement, there are times that we will not truly know their properties, the essence of their being, and their verity; and we will not know what they necessarily imply or from what they necessarily follow. The investigator would thus need to inquire at length to determine, with regard to every species of a thing that he encountered, what is invariably by virtue of its essence; and when he finds this essence in most cases—its exceptions being exceedingly rare—he will still declare it to be by virtue of its essence. A case in point is the existence of a man's five fingers: we do not know, with regard to natural history, how it came about that man should have no less and no more than five fingers; and who would tell us how five fingers are the necessary outcome of the essential properties of the body. But given that that we find this number [of digits] in most cases, it may be said that [having five fingers] is by virtue of its essence, that all human imperfections can be said to have come about by virtue of accident, and that by virtue of the essence of the nature of man he would be perfectly whole, as we generally find.

[b] by virtue of accident: the thing is due to chance and happenstance without necessarily following from the nature of the thing and its essence. There are two kinds of accidents. If one digs a foundation and finds a treasure without being told of its being buried there, then even if he sought a treasure his find is in any event an accident, since it is not necessarily in the nature of a foundation to have a treasure beneath it, being that this seldom occurs. And in the event that he knew of a treasure there but did not intend to find it at this time, this is an unintended matter that is also referred to as an accident.

[c] or by something other than man: in my humble opinion it appears that Maimonides was here referring to the separate intellects. This is because with regard to God, may He be exalted, there is no matter that is not known, understood, or intended by Him on account of Himself; and whether that thing is good or evil, it is already intended by Him from the good that comes from it; and in any event, there is no accident except in relation to our deficient knowledge and our weak discernment. This is so since God apprehends all possible and existent things with His sublime apprehension that has neither limit nor end, [apprehending] what inheres in them, their essence and their truth, without any of their properties being hidden from Him. God knows their properties and attributes that necessarily follow from them before He created them, bringing them from absolute nothingness to their substantive existence. Likewise, with regard to all accidental properties that, as we said, may or may not exist, God already knows their realization *for all eternity* (Ps. 103:17) and decreed which things would exist, how they would exist, and when they would exist; *as he*

would decree so it would be (Job 22:28). As such, there is no accident, occurrence, or attribute without the will of the Creator and His particular purpose.

Notwithstanding all this, evil does not descend from the heavens, as the Sages have stated,[4] and Maimonides explained their intention in part two of the *Guide*.[5] One would do well to understand this profound perspective, namely, how *from the word of the Supreme the good went out* into the world with particular purpose from the Creator, and *evil came along and appeared in its midst* (Lam. 3:38, Job 1:6) on account of the privation and decline bound up with all finite things. Nevertheless, the Merciful One did not allow for destruction except on account of the good that would extend from it and was strongly and indissolubly bound to it. In this respect, one can justifiably say that there is nothing that is not known, understood, or intended by the Creator, may His name be exalted—the good in and of itself, and the bad on account of the good that comes from it—and that there is no pure accident and randomness in the world except with regard to *those who dwell in houses of clay* (Job 4:19). And so, if a person dug a foundation and found a treasure, although it may have been an accident with regard to the intention of the digger, he nevertheless received this good intentionally from the One who puts all causes into motion, All-Seeing and Perceiving the outcome of a thing from the beginning.[6] This is enough to prevent you from error.

4. Gen. R. 51(3).

5. Mendelssohn was presumably referring to *Guide* III:10–12, where Maimonides cited this rabbinic teaching and discussed the nature of evil at length.

6. The wording here, *ha-ṣofeh u-mabiṭ sof davar me-reʾshito*, echoes the popular liturgical poem *Yigdal*.

Chapter 14

MENDELSSOHN'S PREFACE

In this chapter, Maimonides delineated each of the sciences and their subject matter according to the disciplines of his own day. He indicated in the introduction to this work that he would offer only an explanation of the terms, since his sole intention was to teach a certain eminent person who inquired about the terms used by logicians, and not to plumb the depths of wisdom to reach their source. If you, dear reader, long to know the definition and object of each of the sciences in line with the ways in which modern scholars have expanded them and made valuable and wonderful new discoveries since the days of Maimonides, see the *Treatise on Science* written by the most learned master and physician, Aaron Emmerich;[1] *the knowledge will delight you* (Prov. 2:10). At first I thought to copy all that was said there, *pleasant words that are like a honeycomb* (Prov. 16:24), because that booklet, small in size but precious in value, was published in a limited edition. But I did not want to stray inappropriately from Maimonides' intention since I only set out to explain his words.

MAIMONIDES

[I] The term *dibbur*, according to the usage of ancient scholars of the perfected[a] nations, is a homonym having three meanings. The first is the faculty unique to man by which he conceives intelligibles, acquires the arts, and distinguishes between the repugnant and the agreeable; this is called the rational faculty, and also the rational soul.[b] The sec-

1. The reference is to *Maʾamar ha-Maddaʿ* (Hamburg, 1765) of Aaron Solomon Gumpertz (1723–69), also known by the family name Emmerich. Gumpertz was a university-educated physician widely read in the sciences and humane letters, and he served as one of Mendelssohn's mentors and informal teachers. *Maʾamar ha-Maddaʿ* was an extended argument for the importance of scientific education and the compatibility of such knowledge with religion.

ond meaning is the notion itself which man has conceived, and this is also called internal speech.[c] The third meaning is the linguistic expression of that notion that was impressed upon the soul, and this meaning is called external speech.[d]

This art, whose parts Aristotle set down and completed in eight books,[2] endows the rational faculty with methods pertaining to the intelligibles, namely internal speech, so that [this art] guards it from error and leads it to what is correct such that it attains truth with respect to what man's faculty can attain. This art also presents rules common to all languages that guide external speech to what is correct and guard it from error, so that what is expressed by the tongue corresponds and is equivalent to what is in the soul, with the expression neither adding nor detracting from that notion. On account of these benefits conferred by this art, they called it the art of logic [*higgayon*]. They said that the relation of the art of logic[e] to the intellect is like the relation of the art of grammar to language.[f]

Commentary

[a] perfected nations: [cultivated] in the sciences and in governance, for the understanding of *dibbur* is too fine and sublime for the mass of inferior nations; in German, this would be *polierte Völker*.[3]

[b] rational soul: *verständige Seele*.

[c] internal speech: this being the thought of the rational soul before a person utters it with his lips.

[d] external speech: this is the vocal expression by which the listener understands what is in the speaker's mind.

[e] art of logic: *Die Kunst der Dialektik*, which is comprised of two parts. One part guides the intelligent soul and internal speech and will impart the rules

2. In ch. 10 of *Millot ha-Higgayon*, Maimonides referred to Aristotle's *Categoriae* as the first of the books of logic, and then proceeded to list the others: "The second deals with complex notions, and that is the *Book of Interpretation* [*De Interpretatione*]. The third is the *Book of Syllogism* [*Analytica Priora*]. . . . These three books are of a general nature with reference to the five subsequent books. The first of these five, that is, the fourth, is the *Book of Demonstration* [*Analytica Posteriora*], the fifth is the *Book of Dialectics* [*Topica*], the sixth is the *Book of Rhetoric* [*De Rhetorica*], the seventh is the *Book of Sophism* [*De Sophisticis Elenchis*], and the eight is the *Book of Poetry* [*De Poetica*]."

3. That is, polished or refined peoples.

of syllogisms, demonstration, and proof, as mentioned earlier. It teaches man to distinguish between truth and falsehood, good and evil, the agreeable and the repugnant, to the degree that man has the facility to discern. The second part guides external speech in a general way that encompasses all languages and teaches us how to articulate the thoughts and ideas of the intellect by means of vocal expression, such that the external speech and expression correspond to the internal speech without adding or detracting from it, to the degree that the listener will understand the intention of the speaker without addition or omission.

[f] to language: just as the grammar of a particular language guides everything that a man expresses vocally, so too the art of logic guides us to the workings of the intellect, be it internal or external speech, in a general way that encompasses all languages, as we have said. Art in German is *Kunst*.

MAIMONIDES

[II] The term "art" [*mela'khah*], according to the ancient scholars, is a homonym applied to every theoretical science[g] as well as to activities of a technical sort. Each of the philosophical sciences is called a theoretical art, and carpentry, stone-cutting, and the like are called a technical art.[h] The term "philosophy"[i] is also a homonym, sometimes applied to the art of demonstration, and sometimes the sciences; this [latter] term is applied to two [classes] of sciences, the first of which is referred to as theoretical philosophy, and the other, practical philosophy, which is also called human philosophy or political philosophy.

Theoretical philosophy is divided into three parts: mathematics, natural science, and divine science. The science of mathematics does not examine material things as they are, but rather notions abstracted from their matter,[j] even if those notions exist only in matter.[k] The parts of this science, which are its roots, are four: arithmetic,[l] geometry,[m] astronomy,[n] and the science of composing melodies, that is, music. These parts are called the propaedeutic science.

Commentary

[g] theoretical science: the term "art" thus applies to the preparation of the soul to investigate, apprehend, and explain by means of demonstration all that we seek to prove in any of the sciences.

[h] technical art: the training of a person's limbs to prepare carpentry-work, stone-cutting, and the like.

[i] philosophy: this is a Greek word whose meaning is the love of wisdom [*philosophia*]. This term originated with a wise man who was referred to by his students as *sophos*, meaning wise. He responded that only God is wise, and anyone formed of matter should appropriately be called *philosophos*, meaning one who loves wisdom and desires to attain it.[4]

[j] from their matter: that is, mathematics will not investigate what material things are made of, how they move, whether they are light or heavy, wet or dry; rather, it will only concern itself with the fact it is subject to defined measurement of length, width, and height. As such, mathematics will remove these attributes from matter and then study them.

[k] only in matter: he means that even though with regard to the nature of existent things one would not find an object of defined measurement except for material that was compound, mobile, light or heavy, cold or wet, etc., mathematics does not examine material things as they exist, but rather, matters pertaining to measurement alone.

[l] arithmetic: *Rechenkunst*, *arithmetica*.

[m] geometry: *Meßkunst*, *geometria*.

[n] astronomy: *astronomia*, *Sternkunde*.

MAIMONIDES

[III] Natural science examines material things that exist in nature [and] not by the will of man,[o] such as the species of minerals, plants, and animals. Natural science examines all of these and whatever exists in them, I mean, their accidents, properties, and causes, as well as that in which they exist, such as time, space, and motion. Divine science is divided into two parts. One of them is the examination of every extant thing that is neither a material thing nor a force in a material thing.[p] It is the discourse regarding that which pertains[q] to God, may His name be exalted, as well as the angels, according to the opinion [of the ancients]. For they do not think that the angels are material things[r] and called them separate intellects, meaning that they are separate from

4. Mendelssohn was repeating the quaint passage found in the introduction of the third-century text of Diogenes Laërtius, *The Lives and Opinions of Eminent Philosophers*, regarding Pythagoras and the supposed origin of the term philosophy.

matter. The second part of divine science studies is the examination of the very remote causes of everything to which the other sciences[s] may be extended.[5] They also refer to divine science as metaphysics.[t] These are the primary sciences.

Commentary

[o] not by the will of man: that is to say, natural science does not examine things abstracted from their matter by the will of man, as with mathematics, but in their material state as they appear in nature with all their attributes—their [relative] heaviness or lightness, movement and rest, cold and heat, and the like; this is called *Physik* or *Naturlehre*. There is another way to explain "not by the will of man": that natural science examines natural materials and not those produced by the will of man. This is the accepted way of reading the passage and is in agreement with the words, but not with their meaning: for why would this science not include the examination of fabricated materials as recent scholars have done, devoting a part of natural science to natural materials that have been altered by human will and handiwork?

[p] [nor a] force in a material thing: like the rational soul of a person insofar as it is still attached to matter; for once it is separated from matter, it reverts to being a distinct essence.

[q] regarding that which pertains [to God]: he means the knowledge of [ways of] apprehending God, as much as this is possible for man. In German, the phrase "that which pertains to God" would be: *was Gott anlangt oder anhängt*.

[r] angels are material things: according to a few scholars divine angels were not distinct from all material but were comprised of pure and lucent material free of all deficiency. In their opinion, the rational soul of angels is a capacity in that lucent material. But most scholars disagreed and said that angelic souls were distinct from all matter and called them separate intellects.[6]

[s] other sciences: he means that one should examine the universal properties of extant things in order to include the remote causes and the universal knowledge that belong to each [field of] wisdom and science.

[t] metaphysics: that is, something more universal and more sublime than the investigation of the nature of extant matter and their properties.

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5. The text in this edition read: *mi-kol mah she-yiglelu ʿalav sheʾar ha-ḥokhmot haʾaḥerot*.
6. See *Guide* II:6.

MAIMONIDES

[IV] As for the art of logic, [the ancients] do not classify it among the sciences, but rather as an instrument of science. They said that one could properly study or instruct in the academy[u7] only with the art of logic, for it is the instrument to all things and not part of them.[v] As for political science, it is divided into four parts: the first is governance of one's soul,[w] the second is the governance of the household,[x] the third is the governance of the city,[y] and the fourth is the governance of a large nation[z] or the nations. As for the governance of one's soul, he should direct it to worthy moral qualities and the removal of unworthy ones if they have already affected it. Moral qualities are the dispositions that form in the soul[aa] to the point that they are enduring[8] and from which the actions are directed. The philosophers depict moral qualities as virtues or vices, referring to worthy qualities as moral virtues,[bb] and repugnant qualities as moral vices.[cc] The actions stemming from worthy moral qualities are called good, and those stemming from repugnant moral qualities are called evil. They likewise depict reason[dd9]—that is, the conception of intelligibles—in terms of virtues or vices, so that we may speak of intellectual virtues and intellectual vices. Philosophers have numerous books about moral qualities.

Commentary

[u] in the academy: the word should actually be *davar* [something];[10] [or] it may be possible that the school for the study of sciences was called *ḥeder* [academy] in Arabic.

[v] the instrument to all things and not part of them: this means to say that the art of logic is the instrument for every science, and is therefore not included in the sciences, just as the tool for something is not part of the thing itself.

[w] the governance of one's soul: *Sittenlehre*, or in other languages *ethica*. This is knowledge of what is beneficial and harmful, or good and evil, for an individual

7. Mendelssohn's text has *ʿal ḥeder*, following the Cremona edition; the Basel edition had *ʿal seder*, "one could properly instruct and study in an orderly manner only with the art of logic," which appears to be the correct reading; but see his note.

8. *ha-middot hem ha-tekhunot ha-nafshiyot she-tagaʿnah ba-nefesh ʿad shiʿur heyotam le-qinyan*; this text deviates from the all printed versions available to Mendelssohn; see note [aa].

9. *dibbur*; see above.

10. The sentence should thus read: "one could properly study or instruct something only with the art of logic."

qua human being composed of turbid matter and an intelligent soul, formed by the Creator of all, and receiving infinite kindnesses from Him at all times and at all moments. Knowledge of these matters does not suffice; one must learn to train oneself to choose good without sloth or weakness, and to despise evil with all one's heart.

[x] the governance of the household: *Wirtschaftskunde*, *oeconomia*. This is knowledge of what is good and bad, or beneficial and harmful, for an individual as a member of his household wherein they help each other attain the good and beneficial and distance everyone from what is bad and harmful. These are the obligations of an individual by dint of being a husband or wife, a father or son, brother or sister, master or servant, for this constitutes an individual's governance of his household.

[y] the governance of the city: *Polizei*, which is the knowledge of what is good and bad, or beneficial and harmful, for human society [dwelling together] in a city; how they should behave toward one another with justice and equity, fairness, and how to dwell securely in the face of a [common] enemy, and other things of this sort.

[z] the governance of the large nation: *Staatskunde*, *politik*. This is the knowledge of the good and evil, and what is beneficial and harmful, [in relations] between cities and nations; when they should help and when they should shun each other; when they should heed the call of war, and when they should dwell together in peace, and the like.

[aa] dispositions that form in the soul: This is how the text should read.[11] It refers to the preparation that takes place in the soul and will, and the persistence and diligence given to that preparation to the point that the disposition endures in the soul, and through which deeds and actions are habitually arranged, whether to choose the good and agreeable or the evil and repugnant.

[bb] moral virtues: These are the qualities of the soul and the enduring dispositions to love the good and the agreeable and to cleave to it.

[cc] moral vices: these are the qualities and enduring dispositions by which an individual comes to despise the good and chooses to love evil.

[dd] likewise reason: that is, some enduring intellectual dispositions and internal speech are virtuous, others vices; for the moral qualities that Maimonides men-

11. The Cremona/Venice editions (and with slight variations, the Basel edition) had rendered the line as follows: *ha-middot hem ha-tekhunot ha-naʿasot she-yagiʿu be-nefesh ʿad she-yagiʿu le-qinyan*.

tioned are properties of the will consequent upon the choice taken by the soul, while intellectual virtues are properties of the intellect and apprehension.

MAIMONIDES

[V] Every governance by which an individual regulates another is referred to as *ḥoq* [statute].[ee] As for the governance of the household: it consists of knowing how its members should assist one another and what they need for their subsistence, so that their affairs are as well regulated as possible in accordance with the appropriate conditions of that time and place. As for the governance of the city, it is a science by which its masters acquire knowledge of true blessedness[ff] and shows them the way[gg] to attain it, and a knowledge of true evil and the way to avoid it. [It teaches them] to utilize their moral qualities to abandon illusory blessedness so that they will not desire it[hh] and their souls will not live by it;[12] and it elucidates those things imagined to be evil, so that they will not be pained by it and not shun it.[13] Likewise, it prescribes ways of justice[ii] by which to organize their communities in a well-ordered fashion.[jj] The scholars of the perfected nations prescribed regulations and rules in accordance with the level of perfection of each individual among them, by which rulers govern their obedient subjects. They called them *nomoi*, and the nations were governed by those *nomoi*. The philosophers have many books concerning all these matters that have already been published in Arabic, and perhaps even more of them have not been published.[kk] But in these times, we have no need[ll] of these—I mean the statutes, decrees, and *nomoi*—and men have been governed by divine laws.[14]

[Among] all the things whose subject was explicated in this chapter are twenty-seven terms:[15] [1] rational faculty, [2] rational soul, [3] internal speech, [4] external speech, [5] logic, [6] theoretical arts,

12. *ve-lo yeḥayu nafsham bah*; earlier editions of *Millot ha-Higgayon* had *ve-lo yihiyu bah*. Mendelssohn may have supposed an allusion to Lev. 18:5, "and he shall receive eternal life by them [*ve-ḥay ba-hem*]."

13. See Mendelssohn's earlier discussion in *Qohelet Musar*, pp. 36–39.

14. This last sentence of the Tibbonite text is not altogether clear; an alternative translation would be: "But in these times, we have no need of these, I mean the statutes, decrees, *nomoi*, and the governance of people in matters pertaining to divine matters." Mendelssohn's note would support both readings.

15. In number, content, and terminology, Mendelssohn's list differs from those appearing in the sixteenth-century printed editions; he added some terms, changed the way other terms appeared here, and changed the order in which they were listed.

[7] technical arts, [8] philosophy, [9] human philosophy, [10] mathematical science, [11] propaedeutics, [12] natural science, [13] divine science, [14] metaphysics, [15] governance of one's soul, [16] governance of the household, [17] governance of the city, [18] governance of the nation, [19] *ḥuqqim*, [20] *nimusim*, [21] moral qualities, [22] dispositions of the soul, [23] moral virtues, [24] moral vices, [25] good actions, [26] evil actions, [27] intellectual virtues.

Commentary

[ee] *ḥoq*: this refers to any command that a leader issues to one inclined to his authority, particularly when the person being ruled is commanded to obey without knowing its reason, acting only upon the ruler's behest. This is akin to what the Sages said: "I have laid down a statute, etc. . . ."[16]

[ff] true blessedness: there is true good and true evil, and things that are imagined to be good and evil. With [knowledge of] the true good and imagined evil we will attain true blessedness, and with the imagined good and true evil we will lose our way to true blessedness.

[gg] the way: [showing them] what will happen to them by attaining that blessedness.

[hh] so that they will not desire it: once they know and grasp how much true evil will result from that illusory blessedness.

[ii] ways of justice: [it prescribes the ways of justice] in relations between man and his fellow man so that the residents of that city can dwell in *tranquility and trust* (Isa. 32:17), and will help each other as much as possible.

[jj] by which they could organize their communities in a well-ordered fashion: [i.e.,] in matters pertaining to each individual and to their collective, so that some individuals would not contend with others nor with their societies. Rather, each individual *will return home in peace* (Ex. 18:23) and the collective will also be well established and enduring.

16. Num. R. 19(1). This statement is drawn from a rabbinic discussion of the apparent inconsistency and counter-intuitive nature of the laws pertaining to the Red Heifer, which ends with the following declaratory dictum: "The Holy One, blessed be He, says: 'I have laid down a statute, and I have issued a decree! You cannot transgress my decree.'"

[kk] and perhaps even more of them have not been published: For *much dabbling wearies the flesh* (Ecc. 12:12), and in truth, all that the Arabic authors wrote about these matters is drawn from the writings of Aristotle, without adding anything original. They were afraid to augment or detract from the arguments of this Greek, as if *the spirit of the Lord spoke through him and His word was upon his tongue* (2 Sam. 23:2); they hardly scrutinized his claims at all, and all their investigations and efforts were limited to understanding his words and translating them from one language to another. As such, it is fitting for anyone drawn to truth to loathe their books.[17]

[ll] but in these times, we have no need of these, etc.: for *the teaching that Moses commanded us* (Deut. 33:4) guides our way in divine matters and in the ways of justice in relations between individuals. We have only to study it and derive from it the deeds *by which man, if he carries them out, receives eternal life* (Lev. 18:5). [These philosophical books] are also of no help or purpose with regard to the governance of the city as long as *Israel is a scattered sheep* (Jer. 50:17) among the nations, lacking a leader for the people and ruler of the city. Rather, *we are all like sheep that strayed wherever the wind* pursued [us] *to go* (Isa. 53:6, Ez. 1:12).[18]

[The terms in this chapter:] [1] rational faculty: *Der Verstand*, *intellectus*. [2] rational soul: *die verständige Seele*, *anima intellectualis*. [3] internal speech: *die Gedanke*, *cogitatio*. [4] external speech: *die Rede*, *oratio*. [5] logic: *Dialektik*, *ars dialectica*. [6] theoretical arts: *betrachtende Künste*, *artes speculativae*. [7] technical arts: *mechanische Künste*, *artes mechanica*. [8] philosophy: *Weltweisheit*. [9] human philosophy: *menschliche Weltweisheit*, *philosophia humana*. [10] mathematical science: *die Größenlehre, mathematica*. [11] propaedeutics: *Hilfswissenschaften*, *scientia instrumentalis*. [12] natural science: *Naturlehre*, *physica*. [13] divine science: *Lehre von Gott*, *scientia divina*. [14] metaphysics: *Metaphysica*. [15] governance of one's soul: *Sittenlehre*, *ethica*. [16] governance of the household: *Wirtschaftskunde*, *oeconomia*. [17] governance of the city: *Polizei*.[19] [18] governance of the nation: *Staatskunde*, *Politik*. [19] *ḥuqim*: *Gesetze*, *leges*. [20] *nomoi*: *Gebräuche,*

17. Mendelssohn's knowledge of medieval Arabic political philosophy may have been limited, and Zeev Harvey has pointed out that medieval Arabic political thought was based more on Platonic rather than Aristotelian writings. Mendelssohn's harsh repudiation of Arabic political philosophy, in any event, went hand in hand with the early modern repudiation of Aristotelianism in its various medieval manifestations.

18. Note that Mendelssohn was making two different points: first, that Jews do not need the Greek *nomoi*, since they have the Law of Moses, which among other things regulates the "relations between individuals"; and second, that Jews have no use for Greek political philosophy since they lack independence and thus have no practical use for this science.

19. In the early modern era, *Polizei* (or: *Policei*) had the meaning of governance and regulation.

ritus. [21] moral qualities: *Sitten*. [22] dispositions of the soul: *die Sitten*, *habitudines mores*. [23] moral virtues: *die guten Sitten*, *Tugenden*, *virtutes*. [24] moral vices: *bösen Sitten*, *Laster*, *vitia*. [25] good actions: *guten Handlungen*, *actionis bonae*. [26] evil actions: *bösen Handlungen*, *actionis malae*. [27] intellectual virtues: *Verstandeskräfte*, *virtutis intellectuales*.

III

MEGILLAT QOHELET [COMMENTARY ON ECCLESIASTES]

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EDITORS' INTRODUCTION

In his third Hebrew work, *Sefer Megillat Qohelet*, Mendelssohn aimed to revive two distinct traditions of Hebrew biblical exegesis: straightforward or plain-sense (*peshaṭ*) interpretation and philosophical commentary. This dual focus was reflected in his two parallel but distinct commentaries to Ecclesiastes: one devoted to explaining matters of philology, syntax, and grammar that arose from the words and phrases of the biblical text (*beʾur ha-millot*), and another commentary (*beʾur ha-ṭeʿamim*) that focused on the text's deeper meaning. Mendelssohn had already indicated his interest in both *peshaṭ* and philosophical readings of the Bible in the *Qohelet Musar*; the publication of *Megillat Qohelet* marked the realization of these earlier aspirations and what would amount to almost fifteen years of work on various exegetical projects.

Mendelssohn shared his commitment to the revival of *peshaṭ* with other seventeenth- and eighteenth-century scholars who had lamented Ashkenazi Jewry's preference for homiletic and midrashic interpretations (*derash*) and the concomitant failure to study the Bible with well-honed grammatical or philological tools. Rabbinical figures called for curricular reforms, sometimes pointing to the Sephardim of Amsterdam who made systematic study of the Bible and Hebrew language a pedagogic priority.[1] Yet little changed, and the interest in the plain-sense interpretation of Scripture [*peshuṭo shel miqra*] was largely neglected. The situation of the philosophical study of the Bible was more attenuated. Although the study of philosophy did not disappear entirely from the ranks of European Jewish scholars, it was clearly not regarded as a valuable

1. These views emanated from rabbinic figures such as Judah b. Betzalel Loew of Prague (1525–1609), R. Shabbetai Horowitz (c. 1590–1660), and R. Zvi Ashkenazi (1660–1718), as well as other Jewish writers such as Shabbetai Bass (1641–1718), Solomon Hanau (1687–1746), and Isaac Wetzlar (c. 1685–1751). See Jacob Elbaum, *Petiḥut ve-Histagrut: ha-Yeṣirah ha-Ruḥanit ha-Sifrutit be-Polin u-ve-ʾArṣot Ashkenaz be-Shalhe ha-Meʾah ha-Shesh ʿEsre* (Jerusalem: Magnes, 1990), 67–153; Breuer, *Limits*, 72–73; and David Sorkin, *The Berlin Haskalah and German Religious Thought* (London: Valentine Mitchell, 2000), 38–62.

cultural or intellectual endeavor and remained marginal at best. Here, however, there were no early modern scholars calling for its revival, much less that of philosophical exegesis. Mendelssohn had to reach all the way back to medieval Spanish and Provençal writings to find scholarly models and precedents.[2]

As with his earlier Hebrew writings, Mendelssohn's commitment to the renewal of these exegetical traditions required him to revive inherited knowledge and methods, yet he also developed and extended these approaches, sometimes in innovative ways. He reengaged and systematized ideas articulated by medieval Jewish scholars, but he clearly did so with an eye toward contemporary European thought. Among the new issues that European scholars had raised in the seventeenth century was a critical approach to the study of Scripture that contested inherited theological interpretations, emphasizing the ways in which such readings distorted and even manipulated the Bible's meaning. Scholars such as Spinoza and Richard Simon were joined by others in dismissing rabbinic exegesis as little more than homiletic fantasy.[3] In the course of the eighteenth century a variety of French writers, including *philosophes* such as the Marquis d'Argens and Montesquieu, popularized these views, which then penetrated the burgeoning German enlightenment, especially in Prussia. Well aware of these developments, Mendelssohn felt compelled to defend the very nature of traditional Jewish exegesis. At the same time, and in the hands of some of the same writers, the very idea of revealed religion—both Judaism and Christianity—was subjected to criticism and ridicule, with the Bible viewed increasingly as a font of stupidity and superstition. Here, too, Mendelssohn appeared to face a stiff challenge to his abiding belief in the fundamental harmony of religion and philosophy as well as the philosophical grounding of Scripture.

Let us turn first to Mendelssohn's introduction and its systematic presentation of approaches to Biblical interpretation. In the medieval period, Jewish exegetes had developed the rabbinic notion that biblical verses of a non-legal nature could yield multiple meanings and formalized it under the rubric of *PaRDeS*, a fourfold approach to the interpretation of Scripture (plain, homiletical, allegorical, esoteric). Like some of his medieval and early modern predecessors, Mendelssohn was keen to underscore the importance of *peshaṭ* without impugning the other approaches. Moreover, Mendelssohn's universalist and enlightened com-

2. Regarding the study of philosophy in early modern Europe, see Joseph Davis, *Yom-Tov Lipmann Heller: Portrait of a Seventeenth-Century Rabbi* (Oxford: Littman Library, 2004); Jacob Elbaum, *Petiḥut ve-Histagrut*; and Gad Freudenthal, "Jewish Traditionalism and Early Modern Science: Rabbi Israel Zamosc's Dialectic of Enlightenment (Berlin, 1744)," in Robert Westman and David Biale, eds., *Thinking Impossibilities: The Intellectual Legacy of Amos Funkenstein* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2008), 65–76.

3. Hans-Joachim Kraus, *Geschichte der historisch-kritischen Erforschung des Alten Testaments*, 3rd ed. (Neukirchen: Neukirchener Verlag, 1982), 44–79; Emil G. Kraeling, *The Old Testament since the Reformation* (London: Lutterworth Press, 1955), 43–58; Breuer, *Limits*, 84–86.

mitments convinced him that he needed to defend the simultaneous veracity of these modes by devising a natural argument that appealed neither to revelation nor to the authority of Scripture. He chose to base his argument on the nature of language: the multiple meanings that medieval exegesis presumed are inherent in the very way people use language. To this end, he adopted and developed the medieval Tibbonite Hebrew terminology of "primary" and "secondary" intentions.[4] The *peshaṭ* arises from the context and setting. In natural circumstances, both speaker and listener are primarily concerned with the sense that the words convey rather than with the words themselves, a notion that Mendelssohn easily located in the exegetical writings of Abraham Ibn Ezra when the latter explained the differing versions of the decalogue (Exodus 20 and Deuteronomy 5). Mendelssohn posited that all speech, from the most mundane to the prophetic, embodied such a "primary intention" or plain meaning, and that the rabbinic and medieval Jewish interpreters of the Bible took this for granted.[5]

The secondary intention or meaning (*derash*, or as Mendelssohn preferred it, *derush*), in contrast, emerged not from the contextual sense of words, but rather from a heightened sensitivity to the isolated particulars of a text, extending to "each and every word, letter, and even tittle." Through the precise choice of words or their lexical coloration and shading, the "natural speaker" communicates other meanings that inhere in the words even though they are rendered obvious or explicit. What is true for the natural speaker is no less true for the speech employed in Scripture; because inspired speakers and prophets were so attuned to the effect and power of language, their writings had to be read with special attention to such secondary intentions.[6] This decoding of the Scriptural text and its further elucidation is precisely what exercised the Sages and filled their rabbinic tomes, and in Mendelssohn's telling, they acquitted themselves superbly.

Sefer Megillat Qohelet was written in Hebrew and for a Jewish readership, and Mendelssohn's articulation of these Jewish modes of exegesis was an inner-directed effort to explain the nature of rabbinic exegesis and defend it against Enlightenment critics.[7] At the same time, the essential naturalism of his presentation of *peshaṭ* and *derash* was written with an eye toward harmonizing Jewish hermeneutic traditions with eighteenth-century European culture. He asserted that the multiple modes of interpretation were "neither contrary to the ways of reason and logical thinking nor strange and astonishing to human comprehension . . . ." In fact, they are analogous to creation itself: the world was created according to a divine wisdom in which "one action is aimed at many objectives."[8]

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4. See note 4 to Mendelssohn's introduction.

5. *JubA*, 14:148–49, and below, pp. 123–25.

6. Ibid., 149–50, and p. 126 below. For a more detailed discussion, see Breuer, *Limits*, 184–201.

7. See Breuer, *Limits*, 90–92, 101–5, 140–43.

8. *JubA*, 14:151, and p. 128 below. The analogy between the multiple functions of natural objects and the natural ability of language to yield multiple meanings might have served as a veiled

In his characteristic fashion, Mendelssohn melded a broadly assumed medieval notion with an argument "from design" that was endemic to the German Enlightenment ("physico-theology").[9] These arguments recalled the *Qohelet Musar* in demonstrating the essential concord of Enlightenment and Jewish thought.

In the end, the *beʾur ha-millot* to Ecclesiastes was entirely focused on a *peshaṭ* reading. Mendelssohn's demonstration of the simultaneous veracity of *peshaṭ* and *derash* and his defense of rabbinic exegesis were limited to his introduction. In the work itself, Mendelssohn was determined to offer his readers a clear and concise entrée to the text. In the introduction he announced his reliance on medieval scholars—the comments of Rashi and Ibn Ezra appear often—and singled out a particular indebtedness to the sixteenth-century grammatical and philological work of Solomon Ibn Melekh, *Mikhlal Yofi*.[10] Although Mendelssohn's *beʾur ha-millot* rarely cited any of these earlier scholars by name, his commentary was plainly an amalgam of medieval exegesis to which he added his occasional independent articulations and insights.

Mendelssohn's demonstration of the harmony of Judaism and Enlightenment was an even more pronounced feature of the *beʾur ha-ṭeʿamim*, as expressed in its sustained philosophical interpretation of Ecclesiastes. The fact that Mendelssohn chose to write a commentary to this text, of all biblical books, is hardly self-evident and requires some consideration. This book had long challenged Jewish readers, extending back to the Talmud and its deliberation concerning Ecclesiastes' inclusion in the biblical canon. If this sacred book sought to impart some coherent truth, its lessons were far from evident; instead, readers were confronted with a collection of sayings that appeared contradictory and spawned skepticism or, worse still, heresy. Although Solomon's authority as a divinely inspired writer carried the day, rabbinic unease never fully dissipated.[11]

Why did Mendelssohn choose to write a commentary to this text, of all biblical books? As a text that belonged to the wisdom literature of the Hebrew Bible, its broadly human outlook and treatment of philosophical issues continued to attract the attention of contemporary scholars, Jewish and Christian alike. Mendelssohn first thought of commenting on Ecclesiastes after the extraordinary success of *Phädon* (1767), his German "modernization" of Plato's classic that highlighted his abiding philosophical concern with Providence and the immor-

response to Spinoza, whose appeal to the correct method of interpreting nature was intended to exclude philosophical readings of Scripture. See n. 22 in commentator's introduction below.

9. For the physico-theology see Wolfgang Philipp, *Das Werden der Aufklärung in theologiegeschichtlicher Sicht* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck and Ruprecht, 1957).

10. See below, p. 140.

11. For some of the rabbinical attitudes, see M. Yad. 3:5, Shab. 30b, Meg. 7a, Ecc. R. 1(3). See Robert Gordis, *Koheleth: The Man and His World; A Study in Ecclesiastes*, 3rd ed. (New York: Schocken, 1973), 39–42, 69–70, 121; and Marc Hirshman, "Qohelet's Reception and Interpretation in Early Rabbinic Literature," in James Kugel, ed., *Studies in Ancient Midrash* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2001), 87–99.

tality of the soul.[12] He began to think about presenting these same ideas to a Jewish audience, using a traditional genre and format, and declared his intention to write similar commentaries to the other biblical books of wisdom literature.[13]

In his introduction, Mendelssohn argued that a thorough understanding of the text would amply demonstrate not only the book's unified message but also the substance of its philosophical teachings. Ever the student of Plato, he suggested that the best way to comprehend Ecclesiastes was to read it as a philosophical dialogue in which the contradictory, skeptical, or heretical opinions were presented by a series of interlocutors. Solomon laid out a series of arguments and counter-arguments in which he quoted current opinions or worldly wisdom in order to assess their validity. Mendelssohn used this method to address eight contradictions that Ibn Ezra had identified in his commentary to Ecclesiastes. Some of these were dismissed as being the words of Solomon's notional interlocutors; other difficulties were interpreted in light of the context in which they appeared; and yet others were explained in light of the work's leading ideas.[14]

Mendelssohn's rootedness in the Jewish exegetical tradition was everywhere evident: however innovative and contemporary he may have been, he utilized its methods and addressed its concerns. Saadya Gaon and Ibn Ezra had already pointed to a number of passages in which they thought Solomon presented other people's opinions. Offering an instructive parallel, Maimonides had treated the book of Job as a philosophical parable and dialogue.[15] In reading the book as a philosophical dialogue, Mendelssohn's *beʾur ha-ṭeʿamim* built upon the insights of these earlier exegetes, also drawing for good measure on the commentaries of Rashi and Ibn Ezra. As with the *beʾur ha-millot*, these earlier writings were generally incorporated into the commentary without explicit attribution. At the same time, Mendelssohn also announced his readiness to learn from non-Jewish exegetes. "Given that wise men have instructed us to accept truth from wherever it may come, I also searched the collections of non-Jewish exegetes, and if I found something true, *I offered it to the Eternal, making it holy* (Ex. 40:9)."[16]

12. The relationship between the two works was pointed out by Sheli in *Meḥqar ha-Miqra be-Sifrut ha-Haskalah*, 3–4.

13. Below, p. 141. Soon after the publication of *Megillat Qohelet*, Mendelssohn began to work on his translation of Psalms, which appeared in 1783 (*Die Psalmen. Uebersetzt von Moses Mendelssohn*). This edition did not include a commentary, and he never produced commentaries to the other books of wisdom literature.

14. *JubA*, 14:156–59, and pp. 135–39 below.

15. Saadya Gaon, *The Book of Beliefs and Opinions*, trans. Samuel Rosenblatt (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1948), 275 (to Ecclesiastes 9:4–6); Ibn Ezra to Ecc. 3:19–20, 9:4, 9:7, and 9:8; and Maimonides, *Guide* III:22–23. In *De sacra poesi Hebraeorum* (1753) Robert Lowth had discussed whether Job could be treated as a drama, and Mendelssohn took up the issue in his published review of the book; see *JubA*, 4:53f.

16. Below, p. 140.

Presuming truth to be universal and non-confessional, Mendelssohn was confident in being able to harness the best of contemporary culture for a revived Hebrew culture featuring Biblical exegesis. This assertion recalled the passage in the *Beʾur Millot ha-Higgayon* in which Maimonides was cited for having neutralized the Greek provenance of the study of logic so that it could be used in the study of sacred texts.[17]

As we have already indicated, the *beʾur ha-ṭeʿamim* focused on the two related issues of providence and immortality of the soul that are integral to "the foundations of true religion" since they enable man to transcend the world's oppressive inscrutability.[18] Events in this world are illusory. Without the world to come, God would have created intelligent beings condemned to witness insufferable injustice but lacking all hope of redress. Providence and immortality provide that redress: serving as the foundation of morality, the guarantee of justice, and the key to understanding, they are the "source of life."[19] Employing the technical language of the *Phädon*, Mendelssohn characterized the soul as a simple, imperishable substance for which loss of consciousness is the worst fate.[20] As "true divine wisdom," providence and immortality allow man to pursue his God-given vocation, the quest for perfection. Superior truth engenders an acknowledgment of God's enduring justice and, through the acceptance of fate, metaphysical composure.[21] These ideas, which echoed the *Phädon*, were firmly rooted in Leibnizian-Wolffian philosophy. They were key to the pervasive Enlightenment idea of natural religion as well as to refuting those materialist philosophers of the radical Enlightenment, e.g., La Mettrie, who made consciousness an aspect of matter ("thinking matter").[22]

Mendelssohn's attempt to identify the philosophical meaning with the *peshaṭ* should not be taken for granted. Earlier medieval scholars who embraced the study of philosophy were often not interested in the plain-sense reading of Scripture. Maimonides had argued insistently for a biblical esotericism, that is, an assumption that the true philosophical content was hidden *beneath* the *peshaṭ*. Mendelssohn was not interested in such esotericism and referred to such readings only in passing.[23] Perhaps a more appropriate model was the fourteenth-century philosopher R. Levi b. Gershom (Ralbag, or Gersonides), whose commentary on Ecclesiastes Mendelssohn certainly studied. This medieval work

17. See above, p. 72.
18. Below, p. 132.
19. See the commentary on 9:3, 10.
20. Commentary on 12:7.
21. See the commentary on 8:1, 11:9.
22. See Altmann, *Moses Mendelssohn*, 145–56.
23. Mendelssohn delineated the other two approaches as follows: the third level (*remez*; allegorical) appeared in the form of acronyms and letter combinations, while the fourth (*sod*; esoteric) was comprised of "astonishing" meanings that are deemed "worthy of being concealed and hidden from the masses and revealed only to select individuals." *JubA*, 14:150–51, and below, pp. 127–28.

also included parallel commentaries, one focusing on *peshaṭ*, the other on philosophical meaning, and in the latter it was evident that Ralbag was not overly concerned whether the philosophical teachings emerged from, or harmonized with, the plain sense of Scripture. Mendelssohn's singular determination to link his exegetical and philosophical interests further justified his work: he asserted that in the case of Ecclesiastes, "the exegetes who preceded me did not fully discharge their obligation toward the *peshaṭ*."[24] Earlier scholars had paid attention to individual words or verses yet had not sufficiently studied the text as a coherent whole with a philosophically informed message.

Mendelssohn's desire to reinterpret Ecclesiastes based on the text's extended discussion of various subjects led him to reconfigure the traditional division of chapters and verses, since a subject might continue from one chapter to another and a new subject might begin in the middle of a chapter. Although tempted to renumber the chapters and verses in his commentary, he refrained from doing so out of deference to readers who might wish to reference a particular passage. Instead, the introduction simply provided the reader with an alternative scheme of divisions according to his identification of the subject matter.[25]

Beyond these central themes, Mendelssohn was also attuned to the social and political notions raised by this biblical book, and he ventured to discuss some of these issues in ways that echoed aspects of the public discourse of early modern Europe. He was, as always, concerned with the pursuit of material well-being and the social cost of its excess.[26] His interest in the nature of political sovereignty elicited a comment on the absolute authority of the sovereign and its role in ensuring political stability.[27] His keen sense of the role of justice and its relation to the singular nature of politics elicited the observation that "absolute justice will not succeed in political [matters]" and the endorsement of a reasonable justice that he characterized as "the middle way."[28]

Finally, one would be remiss not to conclude with Mendelssohn's own words regarding *Megillat Qohelet* written not long after its publication. They reflect his humility and candor, not to mention the rigorous scholarly standards by which he measured himself:

> I have published a commentary on Ecclesiastes that has been translated into German by Herr Rabe.[29] However, I confess . . . that there are many passages in Ecclesiastes that I do not understand. I did what all commentators do. I offered an interpretation that somehow agrees with the meaning of the words, and the reader has to be satisfied with this. However, I cannot be satisfied; I know that the

24. Below, pp. 130–31.
25. Below, pp. 139–40.
26. See, e.g., the commentary on 4:4.
27. See his comment on 8:2.
28. See the commentary on 7:16, 19, 22.
29. See below.

meaning given to many passages is so unnatural that no good author wanting to say this would have expressed himself in this way. Was Solomon supposed to have expressed himself in this fashion?[30]

THE TEXT AND ITS PUBLICATION HISTORY

Sefer Megillat Qohelet was published in Berlin in the winter of 1770. It appeared in a free-standing volume that contained the Hebrew text of Ecclesiastes, Mendelssohn's introduction, and his two commentaries. Given his incorporation of earlier scholarship and commentaries, and anticipating his larger Pentateuch project a decade later, Mendelssohn opted to omit all other material traditionally printed in Hebrew Bibles, including the Aramaic translation of Onqelos and the commentaries of Rashi and Ibn Ezra. Like his earlier Hebrew writings, this commentary appeared anonymously. There is nothing to indicate that he intended to conceal his authorship, which in any event became quickly and widely known.[31]

As a biblical commentary, this book had a potentially far greater audience than his earlier Hebrew writings. Published by the son-in-law of Berlin's former chief rabbi (and Mendelssohn's teacher) R. David Fraenkel, the volume did not contain a list of advance subscribers; hence its initial dissemination is unknown. *Megillat Qohelet* did not garner much Jewish attention in the decade after its publication, and when it finally did draw notice it came from Jews with a similar interest in combining Jewish erudition with European arts and letters. The first reaction came from a native and sometime resident of Berlin, Mordechai Gumpel ha-Levi, also known as Dr. George Levison (1741–97),[32] who recounted that while living in London during the 1770s he heard that "a certain scholar in Berlin wrote a commentary to this wonderful book [Qohelet]." Ultimately disappointed with the work, he published his own commentary in 1784.[33] Although never referring to Mendelssohn by name,[34] he attacked every aspect of the work, from Mendelssohn's adherence to the masoretic vocalization and cantillation to his reading of Ecclesiastes as a philosophical treatise.[35] The

30. Letter to Johann Georg Zimmermann, November 1771, in *JubA*, 12,2:22. The English translation is from Altmann, *Mendelssohn*, 275.

31. In addition to the letter cited in the previous note, see the discussion of its reception in German writings below.

32. He was also variously known as Gumpert Levison or Shnaber Levison. On Levison, see Heinz Moshe Graupe, "Mordechai Shnaber-Levison: The Life, Works, and Thought of a Haskalah Outsider," LBIYB 41 (1996): 3–20.

33. *Tokhaḥat Megillah* (Hamburg: David Christoph Eckermann, 1784); see p. 1a.

34. Mendelssohn was referred to throughout as "the scholarly commentator from Berlin," or simply as "the scholarly commentator." From the substance of the comments, there is no doubt as to the reference to *Megillat Qohelet* and Levison's knowledge of Mendelssohn's authorship.

35. *Tokhaḥat Megillah*, 1b.

last of the lengthy introductions to this work lists almost three dozen objections to Mendelssohn's interpretations.[36]

Two years after Mendelssohn's death in 1786, his friend and supporter David Friedländer published a German translation based on the commentaries.[37] As a confirmed deist, Friedländer saw the work as a central tool in reeducating the Jews as men and citizens because it represented "Judaism in its purity," that is, it offered biblical wisdom without rabbinic law.[38] His translation was designed specifically to enable teachers to instruct children properly in the Bible.[39] Friedländer followed Mendelssohn's commentary in determining how to translate individual verses; in regarding the text as a dialogue of argument and counter-argument; and in employing its division of the text according to subjects rather than the conventional chapters and verses.[40]

Within the year of Friedländer's German work, a new Hebrew edition of Mendelssohn's commentaries appeared from the *Ḥevrat Ḥinukh Neʿarim*, part of an edition of the five biblical books (*ḥamesh megillot*) that were traditionally read in synagogues on different holidays.[41] This edition was the first fruit of an effort of some young maskilim to extend Mendelssohn's translation and commentary project to the rest of Scripture. As such, the Hebrew text was accompanied by Friedländer's German translation which, like Mendelssohn's Pentateuch, was printed in Hebrew script.[42] The volume's editor, Joel Brill Loewe, a young Berlin-born maskil, produced an edited version of *Megillat Qohelet*: he omitted Mendelssohn's introduction, incorporating only a few sections in his own introduction, and while he reprinted both of Mendelssohn's commentaries, he removed material that he deemed to be overly technical or extraneous.[43] He also added a series of occasional notes to Mendelssohn's

36. Ibid., 14b–16a.

37. David Friedländer, *Der Prediger. Aus dem Hebräischen von David Friedländer. Nebst einer vorangeschickten Abhandlung Über den besten Gebrauch der h. Schrift, in pädagogischer Rücksicht* (Berlin: Maurer, 1788). Here Mendelssohn was explicitly named as the author of *Megillat Qohelet*; see p. 87.

38. Ibid. Friedländer endorsed observance of the biblical holidays such as Passover and the Sabbath but rejected "ritual and ceremonial laws" (68–69). He emphasized the power of reason (20) and natural religion, and included a discussion of Hindu ideas of God (73–78).

39. Ibid., 40, 88, 90.

40. Ibid., 85, 87, 90.

41. *Ḥamesh Megillot ʿim Targum Ashkenazi u-Veʾur* (Berlin, 1788–89). Aside from Ecclesiastes, these included Esther, Song of Songs, Ruth, and Lamentations. On *Ḥevrat Ḥinukh Neʿarim*, see above, p. 62, n. 32.

42. The use of Hebrew script in Jewish texts written in foreign languages, including translations of Scripture, was a phenomenon that went back a millennium to the advent of Judeo-Arabic, and was employed by German-speaking Jews into the nineteenth century. See the editor's introduction to *Sefer Netivot ha-Shalom* below, p. 224.

43. He also omitted all the parenthetical comments attributed to Hartog Leo; see Mendelssohn's introduction below, pp. 140–41.

commentaries, partly to explain those instances where Friedländer's translation diverged from Mendelssohn's reading. It was this version of Mendelssohn's work that was incorporated into a new edition of the Tanakh published in 1792, when a group of maskilim published translations and commentaries to all the Prophets and Writings.[44] From the end of the eighteenth century until the 1860s, almost all of the later editions of Mendelssohn's Pentateuch (see below, part IV) and the posthumous extensions of Mendelssohn's project to the Prophets and Writings reprinted either the original *Megillat Qohelet*[45] or Loewe's edited version.[46]

With such dissemination, Mendelssohn's commentary to Ecclesiastes served as a point of reference for nineteenth-century Jewish scholars who produced new European language translations and commentaries of their own. Moses Heinemann's *Uebersetzung des Kohelet*, for example, patterned itself on Mendelssohn's work in producing two parallel commentaries (a *Worterklärung* and an *Inhaltserklärung*) and cited Mendelssohn over a dozen times.[47] Mendelssohn's *Megillat Qohelet* also served as one of many sources for a French commentary produced under the editorship of Samuel Cahen, part of the latter's monumental multi-volume translation and commentary on Hebrew Scripture.[48] The impact of Mendelssohn's commentary extended beyond the Central and Western European milieu to the maskilim of Eastern Europe as well, facilitated no doubt

44. *Minḥah Ḥadashah* (Vienna: Schmid, 1792). This edition, among the first Hebrew books printed by the Christian publisher Anton Schmid, was also reprinted in 1806–9. Note that the later Viennese Schmid editions (see n. 45) abandoned the edited Loewe version and reprinted the original edition of *Megillat Qohelet*, including Mendelssohn's introduction.

45. See, e.g., *Derekh Selulah* (Fürth: D. Zürndorfer, 1801–3; reprinted in 1824); an untitled Pentateuch (Offenbach: Zvi Hirsch and Abraham Spitz, 1808–9; reprinted 1821–24); *Kitve Qodesh* (Vienna: Schmid, 1817–18); and *Sefer Netivot ha-Shalom* (Vienna: Schmid, 1846). These editions also included Rashi's commentary.

46. See, e.g., *Meqor Ḥayyim* (Berlin: [n.p.], 1831–33); *Sifre Qodesh* (Prague: M.I. Landau, 1833–37) [Qohelet was published in a separate volume of *Ḥamesh Megillot* in 1834]; and *Miqra᾽e Qodesh*/*Sefer Netivot ha-Shalom* (Vilna: Romm, 1852). The only nineteenth-century editions of Mendelssohn's Pentateuch or the "maskilic" Tanakh that included neither version of *Megillat Qohelet* were the editions published in Karlsruhe, 1805–39, and Vienna, 1861.

47. (Berlin: Voss, 1831); for citations, see, e.g., the *Worterklärung* on 1:7,13, 2:8,12, 3:1, 9:1–2, 12:5, and the *Inhaltserklärung* on 1:16, 3:16–17, and 9:1–2. Heinemann made extensive use of Gesenius and other contemporary German scholars but still maintained Mendelssohn's usefulness and relevance. By contrast, other German-Jewish writers clearly had far less use for Mendelssohn, generally lumping him with other pre-modern Jewish exegetes. See Solomon Auerbach, *Qohelet ʿim Beʾur ve-Targum Ḥadash* (Breslau: [n.p.], 1837) 6; and Levi Herzfeld, *Qohelet: Übersetzt und Erläutert* (Braunschweig: E. Leibrock, 1838), who was far more intent on engaging German scholars like Augustus Knobel and others.

48. *La Bible, Traduction Nouvelle, avec L'Hebreu en Regard . . . par S. Cahen* (Paris: Chez l'auteur, 1831–51); Ecclesiastes appears in vol. 16, published in 1848. In his preface to this volume, Cahen stated that most of the commentary on this book was the work of Leopold Dukes, a Hungarian-born scholar of note.

by the many available editions.[49] With its fusion of traditional and enlightened elements, Mendelssohn's *Megillat Qohelet* served as something of a model for moderate maskilim. The Polish maskil Mendel Lefin of Satanow (1749–1826), who spent a number of years in Berlin in the early 1780s, appeared to have been inspired by Mendelssohn's example when he chose to begin his Yiddish translation of the Bible with the book of Ecclesiastes.[50] The Lithuanian Mordechai Aaron Günzberg (1795–1846) credited Mendelssohn's commentary to Ecclesiastes, among other books, with helping him to develop as a critical thinker.[51] The fact that Mendelssohn's work became something of a point of reference for nineteenth-century maskilic scholarship is evident in the writings of Nahman Krochmal[52] and Mordechai Plungian,[53] both of whom treated this work seriously even when they dissented from it.

Finally, given the blurred boundaries between nineteenth-century traditional and maskilic scholarship, it is hardly surprising to find that rabbinic scholars in both Central and Eastern Europe also studied Mendelssohn's commentary.[54] Traditionalists appeared to be particularly interested in the introduction's articulation of the relationship of *peshaṭ* and *derash*. In Vilna, some aspects of Mendelssohn's hermeneutical discussion appeared without attribution in a curious hagiographical work, *Toledot Adam*.[55] In 1839, R. Jacob Zvi Meklenburg, the

49. Three of the four editions of Mendelssohn's Pentateuch printed in Eastern Europe in the first half of the nineteenth century reproduced the Loewe edition of 1788: Warsaw (1836), Vilna (1847), and Vilna (1852). Note, however, that many of the editions published in Central Europe were sold in Jewish communities to the east, as is evident from the subscription lists; as such, many copies of the original complete version of *Megillat Qohelet* also circulated in Eastern European lands.

50. *Sefer Qohelet ʿim Targum Yehudit u-Veʾur* (Odessa: M. Beilinson, 1873). Although the book appeared posthumously, the manuscript was completed before 1788; see Nancy Sinkoff, O*ut of the Shtetl: Making Jews Modern in the Polish Borderlands* (Providence, RI: Brown Judaica Studies, 2004), 173–76.

51. This was recounted in his autobiography, published posthumously as *Aviezer* (Vilna: S. Y. Fin and T. Rozenkrants, 1863), 116–17. Günzberg also mentioned the impact of Mendelssohn's *Phädon*. On Günzberg see Israel Bartal, "Mordechai Aaron Günzburg" in Frances Malino and David Sorkin, eds., *Profiles in Diversity: Jews in a Changing Europe*, 2nd ed. (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1998), 129–30.

52. Krochmal (1785–1840) cited Mendelssohn as one of the modern scholars who maintained Solomon's authorship of Ecclesiastes; see *Moreh Nevukhe ha-Zeman* in *Kitve Rabbi Naḥman Qrokhmal*, 143. Cf. Jay Harris, *Nachman Krochmal: Guiding the Perplexed of the Modern Age* (New York: New York University Press, 1991), 172–91, 199–200.

53. *Kerem li-Shelomoh, ve-hu Beʾur Maspiq ʿal Sefer Qohelet* (Vilna: [n.p.], 1857); see, e.g., his *Maṣref le-Beʾur* on 1:1, 2:1, 5:8, and 7:1.

54. See, for example, Hanokh Zundel b. Isaiah Luria, *Kenaf Renanim* (Krotoschin: D.B. Manash, 1842), 224; and Zvi Hirsch Kalischer, *Emunah Yesharah* (Krotoschin: D.B. Manash, 1843), I:109, 151.

55. See R. Yehezkel Feivel b. Ze'ev Wolf, *Toledot Adam* (Dyhernfurth: Mai, 1801), 44b. For a discussion of this work and its use of maskilic material, see Edward Breuer, "The Haskalah in Vilna: R. Yehezkel Feivel's *Toldot Adam*," *Torah u-Madda Journal* 7 (1997): 15–40.

Chief Rabbi of Königsberg, incorporated Mendelssohn's terminology and conceptual approach to biblical exegesis in the introduction to his important commentary to the Pentateuch, *Ha-Ketav ve-ha-Qabbalah*.[56] The second edition of this work (1852), which added extensive notes, contained a lengthy discussion, drawn almost verbatim from Mendelssohn's introduction, of how the biblical text could yield disparate but simultaneously true meanings.[57] Partly because of its appropriation in these two texts, Mendelssohn's exegetical ideas resonated in traditional literature and continue to echo, albeit unrecognized, in Orthodox scholarship down to the present.[58]

Ironically, Mendelssohn has fared less well among modern Jewish biblical scholars who generally ignored this commentary. One notable exception is Michael V. Fox, whose recently published commentary to Ecclesiastes (as part of the Jewish Publication Society Bible Commentary) refers to Mendelssohn's work.[59]

Reactions to Mendelssohn's commentary to Ecclesiastes, finally, can be noted among Christian scholars as well. A little over a year after its publication, *Megillat Qohelet* was reviewed in one of the main German literary journals, the *Allgemeine Deutsche Bibliothek*.[60] This anonymous review, which identified Mendelssohn as the author, was thoroughly condescending, chastising him for his continuing allegiance to rabbinic and medieval Jewish exegesis and his neglect of Christian scholarship. Mendelssohn received a more appreciative reception from a Protestant Hebraist, Johann Jacob Rabe, a chaplain and scholar who translated the entire work into German.[61] This German edition garnered some

56. See *Ha-Ketav ve-ha-Qabbalah* on Deut. 30:14. One of the puzzling features of this appropriation of Mendelssohn was the fact that while he everywhere acknowledged his extensive use of the writings of Mendelssohn, Wessely, and other maskilim, the comments on Deut. 30:14 remained unattributed.

57. This second edition was published in Königsberg; see p. xvi. Virtually all modern reprints of this work use the Berlin 1880 edition, which includes the same lengthy passage on p. xiv of the introduction. The passage appropriated from Mendelssohn corresponds to pp. 128–29 below.

58. For a nineteenth-century example, see Joseph Zechariah Stern, *Be'ur 'al Shir ha-Shirim* (Vilna: Dvorzets, 1875), introduction, 4b–5a. For a more recent example, see Yaacov Kamenetzky, *Emet le-Ya'aqov: Sefer 'Iyunim ba-Miqra* (New York: Mechon Emet le-Ya'akov, 1990), 219 (commenting on Gen. 44:18).

59. *Ecclesiastes: The Traditional Hebrew Text with the New JPS Translation*; commentary by Michael V. Fox (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 2004); see, e.g., pp. xxvii, and comments on 1:13, 18, and 9:4.

60. *Allgemeine Deutsche Bibliothek* 14 (1771): 173–80.

61. *Der Prediger Salomo, mit einer kurzen und zureichenden Erklärung nach dem Wortverstand zum Nuzen der Studierenden* (Anspach: Posch, 1771). Rabe had earlier translated the entire Mishnah into Hebrew, and Mendelssohn had taken it upon himself to write a literary announcement of this German edition, anticipating and forestalling the anti-rabbinic criticism that such a work would inevitably trigger. His review appeared in letter form in the progressive journal edited by his friend Christoph Friedrich Nicolai, *Briefe, die Neueste Litteratur Betreffend* (1759), Erster Theil, 255–60, reprinted in *GS*, 4,1: 529–31.

attention among contemporaries. The new *Deutsche Encyclopädie* (1778–1807) drew on Rabe's translation of Mendelssohn's introduction for its entry on rabbinic interpretation of Scripture, albeit without attribution.[62] Unfortunately, though perhaps not unexpectedly, Rabe's translation did not do justice to Mendelssohn's subtle conception of Jewish exegesis. As a result, neither he nor Johann Georg Purmann, the author of this encyclopedia entry, fully appreciated Mendelssohn's traditionalist concerns.

In the mid-nineteenth century, the Cambridge Semitist Theodore Preston published an English translation of *Megillat Qohelet* that celebrated Mendelssohn's achievement: "It remained for him to bring to light the true order and connexion [sic] of the portions of this book, the conclusiveness of its arguments, and the excellence of its doctrines . . . Mendelssohn has unquestionably done more than all other commentators put together towards vindicating Solomon from past aspersions on his consistency with himself and the rest of Scripture, and preventing false inferences from his writings for the future."[63] Preston translated Mendelssohn's Introduction, used his commentary as the basis for translating the text (into Latin as well as English), and followed Mendelssohn's scheme for dividing the book according to themes. Recently, an American scholar interested in theology and hermeneutics retranslated Mendelssohn's introduction.[64]

SECONDARY LITERATURE

For further reading, see Breuer, *Limits*, 119–20, 184–201, 204–5; Daniel Krochmalnik, "Tradition und Subversion in der Hermeneutik Moses Mendelssohns," *Trumah* 9 (2000): 90–102; and Sorkin, *Mendelssohn*, 35–45.

NOTES TO THE TRANSLATION

The translation of the introduction and selected sections of *Sefer Megillat Qohelet* is based upon the original edition of 1770. The English text of Ecclesiastes is, however, unique to this volume. To be sure, the version of the biblical text presented here owes a great deal to two fine contemporary English translations and commentaries: C.L. Seow, *Ecclesiastes: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary* (New York: Doubleday, 1997) and Fox's contribution

62. "Auslegungskunst der heiligen Schrift, nach der Meynung der Rabbinen," in *Deutsche Encyclopädie oder Allgemeines Real-Wörterbuch aller Künste und Wissenschaften von einer Gesellschaft Gelehrten*, 24 vols., (Frankfurt am Main, 1778–1807), 2: 488–91.

63. *Kohelet, The Hebrew Text and a Latin Version of The Book of Solomon Called Ecclesiastes with Original Notes, Philological and Exegetical and a Translation of the Commentary of Mendelssohn from the Rabbinic Hebrew* (London: John W. Parker, 1845), 2, 34.

64. Philip Culbertson, "Multiplexity in Biblical Exegesis: The Introduction to Megillat Kohelet by Moses Mendelssohn," *Cincinnati Journal of Judaica* 2 (1991): 10–18.

to the Jewish Publication Society Bible Commentary.[65] In the end, however, primary consideration was given to Mendelssohn's philological and exegetical notes. In some instances, this English version of Ecclesiastes seeks to capture something of the textual uncertainty and ambiguity that drove Mendelssohn's exegetical endeavors. Alternately, when Mendelssohn was explicit about an unusual interpretative choice that went against normative readings, the translation maintains the traditional translation to highlight his originality.

65. See n. 59.

SELECTIONS FROM *MEGILLAT QOHELET*

COMMENTATOR'S INTRODUCTION

There are four ways to interpret our holy Torah. They are, as is well known, *peshaṭ*, *derush*,[1] *remez*, and *sod*.[2] All of them are *words of the living God*, *at once correct* (Jer. 23:36, Ps. 19:10), which is neither contrary to the ways of reason and logical thinking, nor strange and astonishing to the human intellect, as I shall explain with God's help. This is because every utterance has an intended meaning that is pertinent in all respects to the speaker and the listener, consistent with the context and flow of the words[3] spoken without anything extraneous or absent. This is called the primary intended meaning,[4] and the explication of this

1. Mendelssohn consistently wrote this word as *derush* (rather than the more common *derash*) and his preference is maintained.

2. This refers to the well-known notion of the four-fold interpretation of Scripture, generally cited by its acronym *PaRDeS*. Although it originated in the Kabbalistic literature of the thirteenth century (see, e.g., *Zohar* III:110a, 202a), it had also become something of a well-worn trope by the early modern era and was broadly invoked beyond mystical scholarship. Mendelssohn's particular adaptation of these modes of interpretation is made clear in what follows.

3. *gilgul ve-hemshekh ha-devarim*. Although medieval biblical exegetes clearly had a notion of contextual and literary flow, there was no evident terminology to express this mode of reading. Mendelssohn thus drew his formulation not from exegetical literature but from the medieval Tibbonite Hebrew translations of philosophical treatises. In the *Kuzari* II:80, for example, ha-Levi spoke of *gilgul ha-devarim* and *ḥibbur ha-millot ve-gilgulehem*, while Maimonides' introduction to the *Guide* contained the phrase *hemshekh ha-devarim ke-fi peshuṭo shel ha-mashal*; in both instances, the phrases clearly referred to the connection of words as part of a larger linguistic unit.

4. *kavvanah ri'shonah*. The terminology and conceptual approach offered here did not appear in earlier exegetical literature, and its hermeneutical application was Mendelssohn's own. Once again, the formulation drew upon Tibbonite Hebrew usage of *kavvanah* and especially *kavvanah ri'shonah*; the latter, for example, appeared in the *Kuzari*, where the phrase had the meaning of "direct intention" or the "direct result" of God's will. In Samuel Ibn Tibbon's translation of Maimonides' *Guide* II:29 and III:10, similarly, *kavvanah ri'shonah* had the meaning of "primary intention" or "first purpose," and in III:32 we also find *kavvanah sheniyah*, i.e., secondary intention. None of these passages employed the terms in a distinctly exegetical manner, and none aligned the terminology with *peshaṭ* and *derash*. This extended tellingly even to Ibn Melekh's introduction

intended meaning is called *peshaṭ*. Regarding this intended primary meaning, the Sages said: "Scripture does not lose its *peshaṭ* [meaning]."[5]

The manner of *peshaṭ* or the primary meaning is to be attentive to the sense [of the phrase or verse] and not the words,[6] and so with regard to its subject matter, there is no difference between *remember* [*the day of rest*] (Ex. 20:8) and *heed* [*the day of rest*] (Deut. 5:12) or between *you shall not have any desire* (Ex. 20:14) and *you shall not crave* (Deut. 5:18); for their purpose, according to the primary intended meaning, is one and the same notion, as R. Abraham Ibn Ezra explained in the pericope *Yitro*.[7] [As such,] one who has mastered a language is free to use synonyms or phrases [that yield] similar understandings as he sees fit, even though, in truth, every word is distinguished from other synonymous words in some particular matter, such that there are no two words that refer to one and the same notion without some change in emphasis and attenuation or difference in some aspect of speech.[8] It is all the more true that there are no two phrases [that yield] absolutely similar understandings. Sometimes that difference is exceedingly slight, having no purpose with regard to the subject. Alternately, it may be too onerous for the speaker or listener to be attentive to each and every word and to determine if it is more appropriate for the intended meaning on the basis of that nuanced insight. The speaker would then use either of the two synonymous words or phrases without precision, choosing instead to speak expansively and to ease elocution.[9] There are also times that he will use [synonymous words or phrases] for refined eloquence,[10] either repeating the matter in different words as is the habit of poets, or, when a statement requires the repetition of something two or three times, using different words in consideration of its literary charm, as every beginner in the art of rhetoric and poetry knows. Hence, the natural speaker[11] is mainly attentive to the sense [of the phrase or verse] and not the words. And so it is with a prophet or divinely inspired speaker: his primary intention will pay particular attention to the sense

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to *Mikhlal Yofi*, where the terms *kavvanah ri'shonah* and *sheniyah* were used in the general sense of two aims or purposes and not applied exegetically.

5. Shab. 63a. The phrase *en miqra yoṣe mi-yede peshuṭo* served as a byword of medieval biblical exegesis.

6. *lishmor ha-ṭe'amim ve-lo ha-millot*. This notion was first employed in Ibn Ezra's Bible commentary (e.g., Gen. 5:9, Ex. 11:5, 32:9) and then echoed by later exegetes. In light of Mendelssohn's use of the term *kavvanah*, note Rashba's formulation: *en ha-ketuvim shomrim ha-millot raq ha-kavvanot*; see *Teshuvot ha-Rashba* (Jerusalem, 1990) part I, vol. 1, no. 17, p. 55.

7. See his long commentary on Ex. 20:1.

8. This very point had been made at length a few years earlier by Naftali Herz Wessely in *Gan Na'ul* (Amsterdam, 1765–66).

9. *haqel 'al ha-lashon*. The phrase was used by Ibn Ezra in his biblical commentaries to explain instances wherein the general rules of vocalization yielded in deference to ease of pronunciation and euphony.

10. *ṣaḥut ha-meliṣah*.

11. *ha-medabber ha-ṭiv'i*, i.e. one speaking in a natural manner.

while arranging the words in accordance with the beauty of the language, refined eloquence, and poetics, without attaching particular meaning or intended notion to every variation of speech.

However, when a natural human speaker is precise and judiciously weighs the meaning of each and every word without speaking expansively, he then chooses one word or phrase from among those [that yield a] similar understanding: not another one similar to it in grammar or meaning, [and] not by chance or happenstance or for the sake of refined [language]. Rather, [he chooses a word or phrase] to allude to and indicate a particular matter that he would not—or could not—explain more fully, whether out of love of brevity or for some other reason, and the desired aim of that precise [word or phrase] is like a second intended meaning; the speaker does not intend to convey it as essential and primary, but by way of intellect and acuity.

An example of this is Judah saying to Joseph, [*allow your servant to speak a word in the ears of my Lord, and do not let your anger flare against your servant*,] *for you and Pharaoh are alike* (Gen. 44:18). [Commenting on the last phrase,] Rashi explained: "'You are as important in my eyes as a king'—this is the scriptural *peshaṭ*. Its midrashic interpretation is: 'You will end up being stricken with leprosy, just as Pharaoh was stricken on account of my great-grandmother Sarah,'" etc.[12] The first approach is referred to as the *peshaṭ* of the phrase, as it was certainly the speaker's primary intended meaning. For we see from the context of the words that precede and follow it that while Judah truly thought to speak severely with the master of the land, he did so with fear and submission, heeding the dictates of civility and wisdom as befit a stranger sojourning in a foreign land not to speak harshly with [the master] and to provoke him. As such, he clearly sought to praise him by saying *you and Pharaoh are alike*. However, being that he spoke obliquely and did not explain himself by saying "you are *a prince, a great man* (1 Sam. 3:38)" or "I regard you as I would a king," it would seem that Judah's second intention was to tell Joseph that even if he was to be regarded as Pharaoh, he was not any better than him, and perhaps he would come to be stricken just like Pharaoh had been stricken, etc. Such is the manner of one who knows how to measure his words in the presence of princes and dignitaries: when he wishes to reprove them in their presence or to mention something they would consider disagreeable, he conceals his intent in words of praise and flattery, and an intelligent individual would understand their second intended meaning and take it to heart. In our case Judah undoubtedly spoke to Joseph in the manner of a natural human speaker, but he nonetheless conveyed a second meaning that was especially pertinent to the matter at hand. Still, from the context and the flow of words, we know that this was not his primary intended meaning.

12. The midrashic source is Ber. R. 93(6).

Now with regard to someone speaking prophetically or with divine inspiration, his utterance would certainly not contain something that lacked particular meaning; and if he chooses a word or phrase from among similar ones, there is some matter which he wishes and intends to convey. He is therefore not only attentive to the sense but even to similarity and variation [in the words and phrases], and all such substitutions, however great or small, intend to convey a second meaning, even if it is sometimes far removed from the primary intended meaning. The explication of this second meaning is called *derush*. An example of this are the words [cited above], *remember* [*the day of rest*] and *heed* [*the day of rest*], or [*you shall not have any*] *desire* and [*you shall not*] *crave*. Even though the primary meaning would indicate that the intent is the same, the utterances of God, may He be exalted, would certainly not contain this substitution by way of chance or happenstance, as we explained with regard to the human speaker. This is because Divine Wisdom does not act without purpose and design, and furthermore, one cannot attribute that variation to literary charm since the text in Deuteronomy[13] intended to repeat the Decalogue as it had appeared in Exodus 20 and not to enhance the literary quality by varying the words. As such, it is certain that all [these variations] were aimed at a particular matter and intention, to alert the attentive and enlightened mind to some meaning derived by one of the traditional and widely known methods of *derush*. And so, using those methods, our Sages acquitted themselves well in interpreting the substitutions and divergences of the first and second Decalogues; and all their words are truth, even though the principle mentioned by Ibn Ezra—that the Hebrew [speaker] pays attention to the sense and not the words—is also true, for he was only speaking about the primary intended meaning, as we mentioned. You will find that even our Sages themselves sometimes cited the *derush* and afterwards asked "what is the *peshaṭ* of Scripture?" as is evident in many instances in the Talmud.[14] We thus see clearly that the Sages never eschewed the *peshaṭ* and the primary intended meaning, which forsakes the words and preserves the sense. However, they provided for a second intended meaning that pays precise attention to each and every word, letter, and even tittle,[15] for with regard to the *words of the living God* (Jer. 23:36), no word occurs by chance without intended meaning, just as He did not create anything in His world without its own particular purpose, as is evident to every intelligent person.

The distinguishing feature of the second meaning is that the intended meaning does not conform in all respects to the circumstances of the speaker and the

13. Mendelssohn used the rabbinic appellation for this biblical book, *mishneh torah* [repetition of the law], reinforcing his very point.

14. See, e.g., Ket. 111b and Ḥull. 6a.

15. Mendelssohn was referring to Eruv. 21b and the rabbinic notion that even the little flourishes and squiggles that adorn the letters of the Torah scrolls serve as a source of Jewish law. For the application of the same notion in an aggadic context, see Men. 29b.

listener, nor with the context of the utterance and its connection to what precedes and what follows it. At times, the interpreter[16] neither considers nor pays attention to anything other than the phrase he is engaged with, seeking a second intended meaning by means of the hermeneutical devices by which the Torah is interpreted, even though that meaning does not conform to the statements that precede or follow it, as would be appropriate. And so, you will largely find that the Sages' *derashot* do not explain the context and arrangement of the biblical verses; rather, they interpreted each and every phrase in isolation and sought out its second meaning. And the lack of connection or correlation between them is not inconsistent with the approach of the second meaning, as is known to every intelligent individual. You will therefore find that Rashi, the light of the exile, whose commentary on the Torah, Prophets, and Writings proceeds along the lines of *derush*, often explains each scriptural verse as distinct and detached from adjoining verses without context and connection between them, as would be proper according to the primary intended meaning.

If the matter derived is not drawn from the precise choice of words and phrases as we have mentioned, but rather from acronyms, telonyms,[17] letter combinations, their numerical value, and the dots that appear above the letters; or generally if the matter is interpreted from some precise attention to letters and vowel points, the explication is called *remez*, as in "[*this is the genesis of the heaven and the earth*] *as they were created* [*be-hibbarʾam*] (Gen. 2:4)—He created them with a *heh*"[18] or "*I have stayed with Laban* [*ʿim lavan garti*] (Gen. 32:5)—and I observed the 613 [*tarya"g*] commandments,"[19] and other similar examples.[20] Sometimes the matter derived or hinted at is something astounding and

16. *ha-doresh*.

17. *sofe tevot*, that is, words that are formed from the letters that appear at the end of words. The term telonym was suggested by David Goldenberg.

18. Men. 29b, and Rashi to Gen. 2:4. In the masoretic text, the letter *heh* of *be-hibbarʾam* was written smaller than usual. The Talmudic passage, coming in the broader context of the shaping of certain letters, included an aggadic discussion that cited Isa. 26:4 as a prooftext. The Talmud then turned tangentially to that verse, *trust in the Lord for ever and ever, For with Yah [be-yah] the Lord you have an everlasting Rock*, and questioned the superfluous use of the prefix *be-* [with], since the second half of the verse could easily be rendered ". . . for Yah the Lord is an everlasting Rock." R. Judah b. Ilai responded by drawing attention to the two Hebrew letters that comprised the name *Yah*: "These refer to the two worlds that God created—one with the letter *heh*, the other with the letter *yud*, but I am unsure whether the World to Come was created with a *yud*, and this world with a *heh*, [or vice versa]. When it is written *this is the genesis of the heaven and the earth as they were created* [*be-hibbarʾam*], do not read 'when they were created [*be-hibbarʾam*],' but rather 'he created them with a *heh* [*be-heh barʾam*].'"

19. Rashi loc. cit. This explication of the verse offered a play on the word *garti* ("I have stayed"), since the numerical value of its letters is 613, the traditional number of biblical commandments.

20. The hermeneutical techniques described here can be traced back to the rabbinic rubric of *noṭariqon*; see, e.g., Shab. 105a; and Num. R 23(2). The particulars of Mendelssohn's presentation of *remez*, however, originated in medieval literature; see especially Joseph b. Abraham Giqatilla's

appropriately hidden and obscured from the masses and revealed only to select individuals; this [approach] is then called *sod*.

We see with regard to the ways of Divine Wisdom that one action may be aimed at many objectives, this being a general definition of Divine Wisdom; and with regard to creation and especially the organs of living creatures, that their Creator intended one limb to serve multiple purposes.[21] For example, He created the nose to smell, to breathe, to excrete excess mucus, and for facial beauty; He created air for creatures to breathe, to produce sound, for the wind to blow and the rain and dew to fall, for a flame to rise, and the like. These are [cases of] multiple purposes attained through one intermediary, and there are many other examples. As such, it is not implausible that [Divine] Wisdom intended for one utterance to have many divergent meanings, all of them being true.[22] This is what our Sages meant when they said "One Scriptural verse can be interpreted in a number of senses."[23] And this is what they said in the *Zohar* regarding the verse *who knows the spirit of men, whether it goes higher, and the spirit of beasts*, etc. (Ecc. 3:21), which was difficult to understand according to the *peshaṭ*; they said that "this verse has a number of meanings,[24] and likewise, each and every word of the Torah has a number of meanings, and all of them are fitting."[25] They explained that verse on several occasions in different ways.

From this you can understand how it is possible to explain everything said with prophecy or divine inspiration according to the different aspects of the *derush*, the *remez*, and the *sod*, and all of them correct along with the *peshaṭ*, which is the most compelling of them all. But there is no difference between the veracity of *peshaṭ* and the veracity of *derush*, for there is no doubt that everything that comes from the mouth of the divinely inspired speaker, and every movement of his lips, is intended for a particular matter and aim. [Such an utterance] will not be *a worthless thing* (Deut. 32:47), just as you will not find in creation something that lacks all purpose.[26] Every sinew from the wing of a fly and the leg of an ant has a particular purpose, even if human reason strains to under-

Ginnat Egoz (Hanau, 1615), p. 9a; and cf. Eleazar of Worms, *Perush ha-Roqeaḥ ʿal ha-Torah* (Bnai Brak, 1978), 21–22, 47–51.

21. Cf. Ibn Ezra's introduction to his commentary on the Pentateuch, where he briefly articulated the same point; see the last line of the third approach to the interpretation of Scripture.

22. Compare a similar statement in R. Isaac Abarbanel's commentary on the Passover Haggadah, *Zevaḥ Pesaḥ*, s.v. *barukh ha-maqom barukh hu*. In drawing this analogy between the multiple purposes of natural objects and the multiple meanings of Scripture, Mendelssohn might have been aiming to rebut Spinoza's attack on traditional interpretations of Scripture, especially the latter's eschewal of multiple and hidden meanings. Mendelssohn was in essence co-opting the latter's claim that the method of interpreting Scripture must not differ from the method of interpreting nature. Cf. Ch. 7 of Spinoza's *Tractatus Theologico-politicus*.

23. San. 34a.

24. Aramaic: *gevanin*, literally meaning hues or nuances.

25. *Zohar* I:54a.

26. See Gen. R. 10 (7) and Lev. R. 22 (2–4).

stand them in detail, as scientists know. There is thus no doubt that everywhere the Sages interpreted [Scripture] according to their [midrashic] approach they neither fled from the *peshaṭ* nor eschewed the primary meaning that is pertinent to the scriptural context. Rather, in their wisdom they saw that the *peshaṭ* would be insufficient for an understanding of the particulars and nuances of a passage, as we have stated.

As an example, the wise one wrote °(Ecc. 9:4) *for a living dog is better than a dead lion*. As you will see in my commentary on that verse in line with the *peshaṭ*, [the biblical author] was speaking of the opinion of those who reject the belief in the immortality of the soul, for whom man and beast are *both an accident, as one perishes the other perishes* (Ecc. 3:19). According to those who reject [this belief], just as the most lowly living beast—this being a dog—is more important than the carcass of the lion, the most honored of the animals, so too with humans. The most afflicted, tormented, despised, and debased of men is more fortunate with his life than the most perfect of human beings after death, which in their opinion is the extinction and disappearance of the soul, this being the ultimate disgrace and negation; see my interpretation of this passage. If so, this does not contradict the statement of [the biblical author,] *better is . . . the day of death than the day of birth*" (Ecc. 7:1), for there he was speaking of the opinion of the adherents of the true religion who believe in the eternity of the soul. According to them, the death of a righteous individual is the journey to true life and the desired felicity, as I will explain there. But R. Tanhum the homileticist[27] °(Shab. 30a) found this verse to be difficult in light of what Solomon himself had said: *I extol the dead, who have already died . . . and better than both is he who has not yet come to be*, etc." (Ecc. 4:2–3). It appears that there too, he spoke only of the opinion of those who reject [the belief in the immortality of the soul] that I mentioned earlier, as is explained there in my commentary. How, according to their erroneous view, could he praise the dead or those not born, if in their view *a living dog is better*, etc.?

According to the *peshaṭ* these verses are all correct. The result of that erroneous opinion is that it subverts reason and [proper] inquiry, and causes the individual [who believes it] such perplexity that he does not know whether to prefer life or death. For if one who rejects [the belief in] the immortality [of the soul] beholds *the evil that has been done under the sun* (Ecc. 4:3), *he will become wearied with life*, *saying "I would rather die than live"* (Gen. 27:46, Jon. 4:3). Or *he will curse the day of his birth*, as did Job, for *many evils and troubles terrify him* (Job 3:1,5, Deut. 31:17) and *with none to comfort* (Ecc. 4:1). Tomorrow *he sets out for his eternal abode* (Ecc. 12:5) and he will return to nothingness as he was before, *without hope* (Job 7:6). And if he thinks that there is no evil greater than absolute nothingness and annihilation, reason will compel him to choose a life of pain

27. *ha-doresh*.

and sorrow rather than death and the annihilation of the soul. He may at times say to himself "Do whatever is in your power to do, since there is no justice and no reckoning." Or he may despair from *doing something trifling or important* (Num. 22:18), saying *the race is not given to the swift*, etc., as is explained in the ninth chapter of this book (v. 11). And so his thoughts will alarm him and *they will fling away his life as with the hollow of a sling* (1 Sam. 25:29) from faint-hearted confusion. There will be an ongoing struggle in his heart between the dictates of reason and the [emotional] turmoil of nature.[28] In this way, *there is no peace for the wicked, said the Eternal,* because their hearts *are like the troubled sea which cannot rest* (Isa. 48:22, 57:20). There is no way to escape this perplexity except with the belief in the immortality [of the soul] and reward in the world to come, as I will explain in the appropriate place, and as I explained at length in my book on the eternity of the soul.[29]

All this is pertinent to the scriptural *peshaṭ* and the primary intended meaning. However, the divinely inspired speaker did not gratuitously choose the example of the lion and the dog. Although [these details] are included for literary aesthetic, it appears that the speaker also had in mind a second meaning in line with the manner of *derush*, namely, to teach us that according to the laws of the Torah the [Sages] permitted one to carry [an object] on the Sabbath for the purposes of a living dog but not for a dead warrior.[30] When King Solomon referred to the superiority of the living over the dead body with the example of the dog and the lion, it appears that he was alluding to what had happened with regard to the body of his honored father when his soul took its leave. This is what R. Tanhum interpreted in that passage.

I, young in years, set out to elucidate this book in a way most appropriate to the scriptural *peshaṭ* and to the context of the verses and their arrangement. For I saw that all the exegetes who preceded me did not fully discharge their obliga-

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28. *hemyat ha-ṭeva'*.

29. The reference was to his *Phädon oder über die Unsterblichkeit der Seele in Drey Gesprächen* (1767).

30. Shab. 30a. This Talmudic passage followed R. Tanhum's discussion of the apparent contradictions of Qohelet cited above. Faced with the death of King David, who died on the Sabbath in his garden, the Talmud took up the painful quandary of his son, Solomon, since Sabbath laws prohibited moving any item—corpses included—that one would not otherwise have handled on that day: "Solomon sent a question to the [Sages'] study hall: My father died; [his corpse] is in the sun, and the household dogs are hungry [i.e., they might defile the body]. What should I do? They responded: 'Take a piece of meat and place it before the dogs [i.e., to divert them from the body]. And as for your father—place a loaf of bread or a baby on it and carry it away. Did Solomon not speak well when he said: 'Even a living dog is better than a dead lion'?" The Talmud, in other words, cited Ecc. 9:4 to elicit Solomon's halakhic lesson: that one may override the prohibition against carrying on the Sabbath in order to feed a hungry dog, but that the removal of a corpse needed to employ another, more indirect, halakhic stratagem. The corpse could thus be moved only when doing so in tandem with an item that one would ordinarily expect to handle on the Sabbath, such as food or an infant.

tion toward the *peshaṭ*. I say this while asking forgiveness from those honorable great scholars. I did not find among them an adequate elucidation that correctly explained the context. In their approach, almost each and every verse is an isolated statement. This would not be deemed appropriate for an ordinary author, all the more so for a wise king about whom it was reported that all his words are spoken with divine inspiration.[31] Beyond the absence of [attention to] the connection and arrangement [of the verses], the way in which most *peshaṭ*-oriented exegetes elucidated this book allowed for many contradictions in the words of this excellent writer: sometimes an idea is cited approvingly, other times negatively; sometimes it is viewed as virtuous, but in another instance the very same thing is viewed as evil. Ibn Ezra noted these contradictions with regard to the verse *anger is better than levity* ◦ (Ecc. 7[:3]) and wrote: "Since Scripture attested that there would never be anyone as wise as Solomon, we know that his words are not really self-contradictory; rather, *they are straightforward to the intelligent man, and right to those who have attained knowledge* (Prov. 8:9)." He addressed those contradictions briefly, although I remain unsatisfied with what he wrote there.

It is true that in the second chapter of the Talmudic tractate Shabbat one finds: "R. Judah the son of R. Samuel b. Sheilat said in the name of Rav: the Sages sought to conceal the book of Ecclesiastes because its statements contradict each other, etc."[32] There is no doubt, however, that what our Sages meant was that someone perusing the words [of this book] would find them to be contradictory at first glance, and that due to the danger it posed to unsophisticated people our Sages sought to hide it away. These saintly men themselves taught us how to resolve the uncertainties and contradictions in the words of that wise [writer]. They said: "And why did the Sages choose not to conceal [the book of Ecclesiastes]? Because it begins with words of Torah and ends with words of Torah," to which Rashi commented, "and all the more so in the middle." They then deliberated upon various explanations for the contradictions, but when they also sought to conceal the book of Proverbs due to contradictions they found therein, they reconsidered and said: "We investigated the book of Ecclesiastes and found meaning; here too [with regard to Proverbs], one needs to investigate."[33] Hence, you see that our Sages did not conclude, heaven forbid, that the words of that excellent individual contradict one another, for that would be the ultimate disgrace for any intelligent person, all the more so for a divinely inspired speaker. As such, it is incumbent upon us to *untie the cords* of uncertainties and to *unlock the fetters* of contradictions (Isa. 58:6), as Ibn Ezra

31. On the rabbinic view of Solomon as a biblical author, see *Seder ʿOlam Rabbah*, ch. 15, and Yal. Sh. to 1 Kings § 172.

32. Shab. 30b.

33. Ibid. The wording here varied slightly from the Talmud, but to no substantial effect.

stated, and to do so in a way that is pertinent to the scriptural *peshaṭ* according to the approach I took in my commentary, as is fitting to one expounding the primary intended meaning.

Before I come to my commentary, I will introduce the well-known principle in resolving the difficulties found in this book, namely, that not everything stated in it reflects King Solomon's true thinking. Rather, he sometimes spoke as if deliberating a matter, posing questions and answering them as scholars do with syllogisms, searching for the truth through reasoning. They attain their goal by sounding out counter-arguments, proposing all manner of doubt and, *with honest scales and balances* (Prov. 16:11), weighing a notion and its contrary, placing ideas next to each other so that they can distinguish truth from falsehood and the correct from the dubious. Seeing that the author of this book wrote using a method of induction and deliberation, one should properly attribute to him only the pronouncement that he made at the beginning—before doubts and counter-arguments were raised—and what emerges in conclusion after the deliberation at the end of the inquiry. This is what the Sages [meant when they] said, "Because it begins with words of Torah and ends with words of Torah," and if in between you find notions that are foreign and contravene true teachings, one should properly consider them to be part of the contrarian, the view of one who rejects or doubts, so that the wise [author] should be spared any blame. This was the method with which the *Zohar* explained the verses in the third chapter of this book, which are difficult words and appear, heaven forbid, to contradict the truth of divine providence and the immortality of the soul that are the foundations of true religion. They wrote: "Solomon was not saying this verse in his own name like the rest of his words, but repeated the words uttered by the fools of the world. What did they say? *For men are an accident and beasts are an accident* . . . (Ecc. 3:19). Fools who do not know and do not study wisdom say that this world [functions] by chance and that the Holy One, Blessed be He, does not watch over them, and that *men are an accident and beasts are an accident—they are both an accident*, etc. When Solomon considered those fools, he said this, and called them beasts, for they made themselves into real beasts on account of these words."[34] See the source cited, where [the *Zohar*] explains the context of the verses in a manner close to the *peshaṭ*.

However, I, young in years, saw fit to explain them in a different manner, for after I reflected upon that entire section [of the book] from beginning to end, I began to appreciate the implication of the verses, that the more correct and strong proof for the immortality of the soul and reward in the world to come emerges from the violence of this world. [The verses read:] *in the place*

34. *Zohar* III:157b. Mendelssohn exhibited an appreciation for the exegetical acumen of the Zohar and other Kabbalistic writings; see below, pp. 137–38 and the *Be'ur* to Gen. 1:31, Ex. 3:13.

of justice there is evil, etc. (Ecc. 3:16), and [*I further observed . . .*] *the tears of the oppressed, with none to comfort them*, etc." (Ecc. 4:1). For one who believes in the existence of God and His providence cannot escape from one of two possibilities: either one believes that souls continue to exist after death after which comes a time of judgment *for all deeds . . . whether good or bad* (Ecc. 12:14); or, heaven forbid, one ascribes injustice and violence to the Holy God. This is irrefutable proof [for the immortality of the soul]. However, a proof based upon the nature of the soul and its very creation is not all that strong, and one can persist in denying any benefit that accrues to man[35] [over beasts], claiming that *both have the same spirit* (Ecc. 3:19); see my commentary. In my opinion, that explication is more fitting to the scriptural context and is consistent with what follows in the eighth and ninth chapters of this book. The ideas expressed there appear, at first glance, to be more difficult and further from the principles of the true religion than what is stated in the third chapter. With God's help I labored and found a forthright path that is close to the truth, in my opinion, in order to respond to all the difficulties in those passages and explicate the words of the wise king so that they do not contradict but strengthen the foundations of the true religion instead.

In the [Talmudic] passage mentioned above,[36] our Sages had the [following] deliberation:

> What was meant by [the assertion that] "the words [of Ecclesiastes] contradict each other"? It is written *anger is better than levity* (7:3) and it is written *of levity I said "it's praiseworthy* [*mehola*l]*!"*[37] (2:2); it is written *I praised merriment* (8:15) and it is written *of merriment* [*I said*] *"what* [*good*] *does this do?"* (2:2). This poses no difficulty; *anger is better than levity* [means that] the anger that God visits upon the righteous is better than the levity he visits upon the evildoers in this world, [while] *of levity I said "it's praiseworthy!"* [refers to] the levity that God shares with the righteous in the world to come. [The statement] I *praised merriment* [refers to] the merriment associated with a religious precept, [while the statement] *of merriment* [*I said*] *"what* [*good*] *does this do?"* refers to merriment not associated with a precept, etc.

It is evident that they interpreted the word *mehola*l in positive terms, as Rashi explained,[38] although according to the scriptural *peshaṭ* it means decadence and foolishness, which is apparent from the context of the verses: *I said to myself, "come, now! I will try you with merriment; and you can take pleasure!" That too is vanity. Of levity I said, "it's mad!" of merriment, "what* [*good*] *does this do?"* (Ecc. 2:1–2). As such, it is clear that [the biblical author] censured merriment and regarded it as something worthless, but the Sages interpreted it [as being positive]

35. An allusion to 1:3.
36. Shab. 30b.
37. The meaning of the word in this context is explained below.
38. The reference was to Rashi's Talmud commentary, loc. cit., s.v. *mehola*l.

since the wise man [specifically] used the word *meholal*, which sometimes connotes praise and a superior virtue and other times foolishness and an absence of intelligence. It is evident from the second meaning that levity can be praiseworthy, but one cannot speak about levity associated with a religious precept, for the [Sages] have already stated that "the divine presence does not come to rest upon [an individual] . . . . in a state of levity, etc.,"[39] and Rashi explained that "a person acting with levity cannot concentrate his thoughts, and even when he does not act irreverently, he still lacks proper concentration."[40] It appears that Rashi intended to explain why the Sages praised merriment associated with a precept but not levity associated with a precept, suggesting that [the Sages] considered any form of human levity to be odious because it distracts and confuses a person's understanding. He noted with astonishment that although the Sages did not wish to praise levity with regard to humans, they nevertheless attributed it to the Creator, Blessed be His name, stating: "*of levity I said 'it's praiseworthy!'* this is the levity that God shares with the righteous." So too with regard to anger. They stated: "the anger that God visits upon the righteous is better, etc.," for the individual who exhibits levity or anger cannot concentrate his thoughts, and the levity or anger brings on foolishness and decadence, and therefore they are odious to Him. But God, may His name be exalted, is not subject to these [sentiments] at all. He will, as it were, revel in righteousness and be angry in justice according to His simple will[41] without, heaven forbid, deficiency or change in any one of His attributes.[42] Therefore, anywhere that Scripture praises levity or anger, one ought to apply the second meaning to God because with reference to Him, these attributes are free of all deficiency and ignominy. For this reason the Sages interpreted the word *meholal* with regard to the levity that God shares with the righteous in the world to come. And given that this levity is highly praiseworthy, [Solomon] concluded [the verse] stating *of merriment*—not associated with a precept—*what good does this do?* for it is good to restrain oneself from that inferior merriment. As for the Sages' interpretation of the verse *anger is better than levity*, it agrees very much with the Scriptural *peshaṭ*, for as you will see in my commentary,[43] the primary intended meaning there is that the impoverished but wise man—the subject of the preceding scriptural verses—is not entirely lacking good, as the masses of fools would believe; for in truth, a man does not know what is good for him during the few days of his life under

39. The rabbinic statement appeared in the same Talmudic passage cited above.

40. Loc. cit., s.v. *seḥoq*. Mendelssohn's citation of Rashi deviated slightly from traditional printed versions.

41. The notion of God's "simple will" appeared in a number of medieval Jewish texts, including Albo's *'Iqqarim*; see, e.g., II:24. In this context, Mendelssohn was stating that God's anger is not determined or motivated by anything external to Him.

42. See the discussion in *Guide* I:35.

43. Commentary (Meaning) on 6:8–7:2.

the sun.[44] Sometimes temporal felicity can be to his detriment, and in reference to this [Solomon] said: *anger is better than levity, for in the sadness of the face, the heart may be glad* (Ecc. 7:3), meaning that anger is not in every instance bad, and levity is not absolutely good for man; sometimes sadness may be good for the heart. But since it is improper to praise anger—for this trait confuses an individual and leads him to error, as we said—the Sages therefore interpreted this anger in terms of divine providence for the righteous in this world. Even if the Holy One, Blessed be He, is angry with the impoverished sage, who in the eyes of others appears to be lacking good things and is *eschewing* [*the good*] *life* (Ecc. 6:8), this anger is better for him than the levity that God shares with the evildoer who has his moment of felicity and consumes his portion in this world.

We now come to the contradictions mentioned by Ibn Ezra,[45] which we will answer using our method of interpreting the verses according to the Scriptural *peshaṭ*.

The first contradiction concerns the use of the word *kaʿas*. "It is written: *anger* [*kaʿas*] *is better than levity* (Ecc. 7:3) and its opposite, *anger* [*kaʿas*] *abides in the breasts of fools* (Ecc. 7:9); similarly, *for with much wisdom is much vexation* [*kaʿas*] (Ecc. 1:18) and its opposite, *remove vexation* [*kaʿas*] *from your mind* (Ecc. 11:10)."[46] The Hebrew word *kaʿas* connotes an agitation and zealousness regarding injustice and malevolence, for it is the nature of the rational soul to view *oppression of the poor and violation of justice and righteousness* (Ecc. 5:7) as evil; and it will be enveloped by a spirit of zealousness to reckon with the evildoer. That oppression may be either real or imagined, for sometimes a person is angry at his fellow man, thinking that he perpetrated some malice or injustice, when in fact this was not the case and the deed was actually for his own benefit. And while anger at true injustice is in itself proper and praiseworthy as is evident to every intelligent individual, from the perspective of the sentiments an angry individual will feel sorrow and pain and will be unable to concentrate his thoughts properly; anger, therefore, leads a person to error, as the Sages stated.[47] It is appropriate for an individual to try as best he can to despise evil and loathe injustice and to reckon with the offender without emotion and agitation—were this possible for *one born of woman* (Job 15:14); and this is the middle way praised by the Sages.[48] [Moreover,] anger at some imagined injustice is foolishness; it comes from the

44. An allusion to 6:12. For Mendelssohn's earlier treatment of the theme in *Qohelet Musar*, see above, pp. 31–39.

45. See Ibn Ezra's commentary on Ecc. 7:3.

46. Ibid.

47. See Sifre to Num. 31:21 § 157.

48. Mendelssohn's reference to the doctrine of the mean—the notion that ethical virtue generally resides at some mean point between behavioral extremes—as a rabbinic touchstone belies a more complicated story. This ethical doctrine was most famously articulated in the writings of Maimonides, and although his introduction to M. Avot suggested that he would draw upon both rabbinic and philosophical sources, most modern scholars aver that Maimonides was chiefly

lack of knowledge and for the most part *abides in the breasts of fools* (Ecc. 7:9) who cannot distinguish between injustice and righteousness.

And so, all those verses are *straightforward and right* (Prov. 8:9). [Solomon] said: *anger is better than levity*, and we explained above that the anger of the impoverished wise man—cited in the previous verses—and his rage at seeing malice and oppression is better than the levity of evildoers who *throw deadly arrows and say "we were only joking"* (Prov. 26:18–19). However, the seventh section [as a whole][49] is speaking about one who finds fault with divine providence in this world and does not understand *the end of the matter* (Ecc. 7:8) and how things will turn out; that verse [concludes with] *better a patient spirit than a haughty spirit* (ibid.)—see how we explained this in our commentary. He then added *don't let your spirit be quickly angered, for anger abides in the bosom of fools* (Ecc. 7:9); that is, since all the ways of God just and equitable, the tranquility of evildoers and the afflictions of the righteous in this world are not, heaven forbid, true injustice—may God be exalted beyond this—but [only] imagined injustice, in the view of people deficient in knowledge. To this [the verse says] *do not let your spirit be quickly angered* by the accidents that befall people, for it is only *in the bosom of fools* that this *anger abides*. And what [the biblical author] said ° (chapter 1), *for with much wisdom is much vexation* (Ecc. 1:18), should be understood according to its subject: for it is impossible for an individual to be completely spared from despondency and pain when he sees a person oppressing his fellow man and *an evil one who devours one more righteous than himself* (Hab. 1:13). And so, *with much wisdom* a person will be more aware of malice, and this produces *much vexation*, for only *one out of a thousand* men (Job 33:23) would exhibit complete self-control and refrain from anger. However, at the end of the book the author cautioned the individual to try to *remove vexation from your mind* (Ecc. 11:10) and to overcome the [emotional] turmoil of nature as best he can. There is a great difference between the dictates of wisdom and the actions of a wise individual. For wisdom dictates that we *do good and withdraw from evil, in peace* (Ps. 34:15),[50] and it demands, by way of example, to *remove vexation from your mind* in a decisive manner. The intended meaning is that since man is granted choice[51] and the power is in his hands, he should see fit to flee from the despondency of anger and its confusion. However, on account of his being human, the wise human being cannot be weaned from such shortcoming; great is the man whose sins are few.[52] Since it is in the nature of scrutiny and reflec-

indebted to Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics* and his Muslim interpreters such as al-Farabi. Mendelssohn did not discuss this ethical doctrine and its provenance in any sustained way.

49. On Mendelssohn's division of Ecclesiastes into sections, see below. At this juncture, the text turns to the next verse cited in Ibn Ezra's contradictions, *anger abides in the breasts of fools*.

50. Mendelssohn paraphrased and reordered the verse.

51. *ha-reshut netunah*, recalling M. Avot 3:15.

52. On this expression, cf. *Kuzari* I:93, and *Sefer ha-Ḥinnukh*, § 573.

tion to heighten sensitivity to harm and benefit and to magnify the distinction between good and evil, it is proper for [the author] to have said *for with much wisdom is much vexation*, etc.[53]

The second contradiction mentioned by Ibn Ezra: "It is written: *it is good that one should eat and drink* (Ecc. 5:17) and its opposite, *it is better to go to a house of mourning* [*than to a house of feasting*] (Ecc. 7:2)." According to what I will explain with regard to the scriptural context, there is no contradiction whatsoever. It is certainly good that one should eat and drink and benefit others with his efforts rather than *toiling for the wind, to consume his days in darkness and with much anger and grief and rage* (Ecc. 5:15–16). Nevertheless, it is not bad to regularly visit a house of mourning, and to go repeatedly to a house of feasting is neither good nor felicitous for man. This simply is the meaning of Scripture when the authors stated *it is better to go* [*to a house of mourning*], etc., as I will explain there, with the help of God.

The third contradiction is that mentioned by the Sages.[54] "It is written *I praised merriment* (Ecc. 8:15) and its opposite, *of merriment* [*I said*] *'what* [*good*] *does this do?'* (Ecc. 2:2)." They already answered [this contradiction by stating that this verse refers to] the merriment associated with a religious precept, etc., as we already pointed out. And furthermore, when the author stated *of merriment* [*I said*] *"what good does this do?"* he was attempting to locate what was ultimately beneficial and felicitous for man in merriment, drink, and song, but after trying this approach, he expressed regret and wrote *of levity I said "it's mad!" of merriment, "what* [*good*] *does this do?"*

The fourth contradiction: "*what advantage has the wise man over the fool* (Ecc. 6:8), and its opposite, *wisdom is superior to folly* (Ecc. 2:13)." I found a *derush* in the *Zohar* regarding this latter verse that is close to the *peshaṭ*, and it is marvelous:

> R. Hiya cited the verse: *I observed that wisdom is superior to folly*, etc. I contemplated some of Solomon's statements and took note of his great wisdom and how he concealed his teachings deeply within the holy temple. This passage needs to be contemplated, for why did he say *I observed that*? Do others not know and perceive it? Even one who has not known wisdom all his life and has not taken note of it knows that *wisdom is superior to folly as light is superior to darkness.* And yet [Solomon] praised himself and said *I observed that*! Rather, understand it as such[55] . . . *I observed that wisdom is superior to folly*, that is, from actual folly comes the benefit of wisdom, for if there were no folly in the world, wisdom and its teachings would not be appreciated. He taught that it is necessary for an individual who wants to study wisdom to learn from folly and to appreciate that there

53. Mendelssohn published a related and similar discussion of anger a year later in "Rhapsodie, oder Zusätze zu den Briefen über die Empfindungen," *Philosophische Schriften* (1771); see *JubA*, 1: 396–97, and the English translation in *PW*, 143–44.

54. Shab. 30b; see above.

55. At this juncture Mendelssohn's citation skipped a number of lines.

> is benefit to wisdom on account of it, just as there is benefit to light over darkness; for if not for darkness, light would not be appreciated and the world would not derive benefit from it, etc.[56] . . . . What constitutes the value of white? Black. Were it not for black, white would not be appreciated . . . Rabbi Isaac said: This is like the comparison of sweet and bitter things. One cannot taste the sweet until one has first tasted the bitter. What gives [something] its sweetness? The answer is bitterness, and with regard to this, it is written [*God*] *has set one against the other* ° (Ecc. 7[:14]), etc.[57]

See the source cited. Moreover, as we will explain with regard to the scriptural *peshaṭ* of that verse[58] there is no contradiction here at all; quite the opposite, as this [statement] was one of astonishment for the wise [biblical writer]. *I observed*, from the perspective of reason, that the wise man is superior to the fool, but I nonetheless see from that which befalls them that they are equal, *the same fate awaits them both* (Ecc. 2:14). See our commentary there. Furthermore, his statement, *what advantage has the wise man over the fool*, is a claim of scoffers, as we will explain with God's help.

The fifth contradiction is mentioned by the Sages, "*I extol the dead, who have already died* (Ecc. 4:2), and its opposite, *for even a dog*, etc. (Ecc. 9:4)"; we have already discussed this above at length.

The sixth contradiction: "*for there is neither deed, nor reckoning, nor knowledge nor wisdom in Sheol* (Ecc. 9:10), and its opposite, *a time for every matter*, etc. (Ecc. 3:1)."[59] I discussed these [verses] at length in my commentary, and in line with my approach, both verses meant to demonstrate the truth of the immortality of the soul and reward in the world to come. The meaning of *for there is neither deed*, etc., is *if* there is neither deed, etc.; see loc. cit., for there is no reason to repeat things.

Likewise, with regard to the seventh and eighth contradictions, if you look at our commentary [to those verses], you will see and understand that the author's statement *will good not come to the wicked and will he not live a long life, like a shadow* (Ecc. 8:13) does not at all contradict his statement that [*I have seen* . . .] *an evil man who prolongs* [*his days*] *with his evil* (Ecc. 7:15). For the first verse, as has been explained with regard to earlier verses, is said in astonishment: Why should the evildoer not attain a little something of the imaginary felicity that is the good in this world and a long life, like a shadow? See our commentary there. Hence, this verse does not contradict his saying *an evil man who prolongs*

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56. Once again, Mendelssohn's citation omitted a number of lines.

57. *Zohar* III:47a–47b.

58. I.e., Ecc. 2:13.

59. The apparent contradiction here is that while Ecc. 9:10 asserted that death is meaningless, the opening eleven verses of Ecc. 3, framed by its introduction in v. 1 and summation in v. 11, suggested that all aspects of the divinely created order of things—including death—was imbued with meaning.

[*his days*] *with his evil*, aside from the fact that this verse is speaking about monarchial rule, as we explained there. Likewise, *good will come to those who fear God* (Ecc. 8:12) is speaking about the true good and felicity in the world to come as becomes clear in the scriptural context there. And when he stated *there are wicked people to whom it happens as if they acted righteously* (Ecc. 8:14) he is speaking of the vanity that exists on earth, as in the opening part of that verse: *there is a vanity that is done on earth inasmuch as there are righteous people to whom it happens as if they did wicked deeds*, etc.

The reader of my commentary will notice that I did not heed the division of the chapters as they are [in the traditional Bibles] before us. In this matter I have followed in the footsteps of earlier exegetes, the majority of whom did not concern themselves with the division of the chapters.[60] For these [chapter] indicators were popularly accepted in order to help the reader who sought out a [particular] verse or word in the Tanakh, but not to determine where a subject begins or ends. Every exegete has the right to place those [section] markers in keeping with his approach to the interpretation of the subject. You will find many instances in this book where none of the commentaries would end the subject where the [chapter] markers are set. I first thought to set the chapter indicators in a manner consistent with my commentary, but I took into consideration that printers of the Talmud inserted their citations using the existing indicators, and I was afraid to change it so as not to trouble the reader in his search [for a particular reference]. I also saw that they[61] sometimes shifted the chapter division[62] for good reason, so as not to pause on a disconcerting matter.[63] I therefore left the [existing] markers in place. Here I will indicate the chapter endings in line with my approach to interpreting this book of Scripture:

Section I	From the beginning of the book until [*those who will come*] *later* ˚(1:11), which serves as the introduction of the work
Section II	From *I, Qohelet, was king* ˚(1:12) to *under the sun* ˚(2:11)
Section III	From *I turned* ˚(2:12) to *empty thoughts* ˚(2:26)
Section IV	From *for everything there is a moment* ˚(3:1) to *under the sun* ˚(4:3)
Section V	From *I observed* ˚(4:4) to *empty thoughts* ˚(4:16)
Section VI	From *watch your steps* ˚(4:17) to *the merriment of his heart* ˚(5:19)

60. With regard to Ecclesiastes see, e.g., the commentary of Ralbag, which divided the book into nine sections, and of R. Moses Almosnino, *Yede Mosheh* (Salonika, 1582), which broke the book down into thirty-one sections. In both instances, the sections or units did not correspond to the masoretic chapter divisions.

61. I.e., those who set the chapter divisions in place.

62. I.e., from a more natural division to where it currently stood.

63. See Ber. 31a, and P. Ber. ch. 5 (beginning).

Section VII	From *there is an evil* ˚(6:1) to *anything against Him* ˚(7:14)
Section VIII	From *I have observed everything* ˚(7:15) to *their detriment* ˚(8:9)
Section IX	From *and likewise, I observed* ˚(8:10) to *suddenly* ˚(9:12)
Section X	From *this too I have observed* ˚(9:13) to *get to town* ˚(10:15)
Section XI	From *alas for you, O land* ˚(10:16) to *both are equally good* ˚(11:6)
Section XII	From *sweet* ˚(11:7) to *who gave it* ˚(12:7)
Section XIII	From *vanity of vanities* ˚(12:8) to the end of the book, which serves as a kind of conclusion and end of the work

Know, dear reader, that I did not draw all the things stated in my commentary from *my own understanding* (Job 8:10); rather, I gathered most of them from the books of earlier scholars. Solomon [Ibn] Melekh's *Mikhlol Yofi*[64] was of great use and assistance in the commentary on the words and grammar. With the commentary on the meaning too, *I did not distance myself* (Isa. 50:5) from the approach of the great exegetes Rashi and Ibn Ezra except where it was necessary; and in those instances where I found that they agreed with the *peshaṭ* of the words and the primary intended meaning of the wise king, I copied their remarks word for word without any change or alteration. Given that wise men have instructed us to accept truth from wherever it may come,[65] I also searched the collections[66] of non-Jewish exegetes, and if I found something true, *I offered it to the Eternal, making it holy* (Num. 18:24, Ex. 40:9). After I completed the work, I sent it to my colleague[67] *with whom my life is bound* (Gen. 44:30); he responded a second time and raised his hand *to remove all obstacles* (Isa. 57:14) and to remove dross and rust from my words. He sometimes added words of *favor and good sense, his statements highly refined* (Prov. 3:4, Ps. 119:140). In every instance that he took a different approach to the explanation of the verses that did not in any way reject my interpretation, I presented his words between

64. Mendelssohn referred to him as *rash"am*, R. Solomon Melekh, although Melekh appears to be the name of his father and not a surname; for reasons that are not entirely clear, the appellation Ibn Melekh was adopted by his later publishers and eventually took hold. The correct title of this book, however, was *Mikhlal Yofi*, first published under that title in 1549 and then in two Amsterdam editions of 1661 and 1685. This work does not appear to have been widely known or used by Ashkenazi scholars until the middle of the eighteenth century. Mendelssohn drew roughly half of his *Be'ur ha-Millot* from its pages.

65. The phrase *qabbel ha-'emet mi-mi she-'omro* was medieval in provenance; see, e.g., *Orḥot ha-Ṣaddiqim* (authorship unknown), Maimonides' introduction to M. Avot, and *Sefer ha-Ḥinnukh*. See also Simon b. Zemah Duran, *Magen Avot* (Livorno, 1763) to M. Avot 4:20, which identified the phrase with the rabbinic interpretation of Prov. 22:17 in Hag. 15b.

66. Lit.: satchels.

67. In his notes to *JubA*, 14:lxxix, Haim Borodianski (Bar-Dayan) wrote that Mendelssohn was referring to Hartog Leo (c.1710–84), a fellow resident of Berlin who served as secretary of the Jewish community. Leo was a learned rabbinic scholar with philosophical interests, and he would have been among a handful of fellow Jews who could both appreciate Mendelssohn's work and serve as an effective interlocutor.

two half moons like this ( ),[68] and the intelligent reader will choose whichever appears to him the best.[69] If readers approve of this book, I will also take up the task of commenting upon the books of Psalms, Proverbs, and Job using the same approach, with the help of God, may He be blessed, *who makes firm the steps of man* (Ps. 37:23).[70] May He give me courage and *grant me strength* (Ps. 18:40) to serve and fear Him. Amen.

68. Cf. his earlier note concerning the introduction of punctuation and literary devices in *Qohelet Musar* above, pp. 39–40. Parentheses were sometimes known in early modern Europe as lunula(e), suggesting the crescent or half-moon that Mendelssohn invoked here.

69. These notes have not been included in this translation.

70. Although Mendelssohn translated the Psalms, he never completed commentaries on these books.

[Section I]

Chapter 1:1–1:11

1:1 The Words of *qohelet* son of David, king in Jerusalem.

Commentary (Words)

1. **Qohelet** is not a proper name but a descriptive [noun],[1] here referring to Solomon, for the only son of David who served as king in Jerusalem was Solomon.[2] He was called *qohelet* either because he assembled [*hiqhil*] many words of wisdom, morals, and eloquent sayings °(*der Sammler* [Assembler]) or because he preached his words in a public assembly [*be-haqhel*] °(*der Prediger* [Preacher]).[3]

Commentary (Meaning)

1. The section from here to verse 12 serves as an introduction to this book; it mentions its general ideas and what it seeks to explain.

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2 Vanity of vanities, said *qohelet*, vanity of vanities, all is vanity.

Commentary (Words)

2. **vanity** [*havel*]: something lacking substance, like the breath emerging from a person's mouth °(*Eitelkeit*). [The *heh*] is vocalized with a *ḥaṭaf pataḥ* because it is in the construct. When this word appears in Scripture in the absolute it is always [vocalized] with two *segol*s as *hevel*; but since we have no other form[4] wherein [the vowels of] a segolate noun shift in the construct, we must therefore conclude that there is also an absolute pattern *havel*, similar to *avel*, which appears

1. Cf. the Commentary (Meaning) on 12:8.
2. Ibn Ezra.
3. Rashi, with reformulation and slight expansion.
4. I.e., a morphological pattern or paradigm.

in the construct as *avel em* (Ps. 35:14). The use of the singular and plural [of the word **vanity**] in the construct indicates the intensification of the description when there is nothing that exceeds it °(*Eitelkeit der Eitelkeiten*), like *the slave of slaves* (Gen. 9:25) or *king of kings* (Ez. 26:7).[5]

Commentary (Meaning)

2. Everything that you see on earth is the ultimate in *vanity, nothingness, and emptiness* (Isa. 49:4). And do not think that there are exceptions, for **all is vanity**; there is no permanent thing or lasting entity under the sun.

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3 What benefit is there for a man in all his toils, that he toils under the sun?

Commentary (Words)

3. **benefit** [*yitron*]: a noun meaning *Vorteil* [profit, advantage].

Commentary (Meaning)

3. All the diligence of humans, their toil and exertion, are worthless and futile, for everything in the world is *fixed and set out* (2 Sam. 23:5) by decree. As things were, so they will be from *beginning to end* (Ecc. 3:11). A man toils for nothing all the days of his life.

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4 A generation goes and a generation comes, yet the earth forever remains the same.

Commentary (Meaning)

4. **generation**: He began with the four elements,[6] and said with regard to the earth, which is one of the elements, that a **generation goes** and comes to an end, and plants and animals and human bodies return to the earth; **and a generation comes**—plants sprout from the earth, and animals and people will be nourished by them. By means of this cycle **the earth forever remains the same**, for all things that degenerate return to the earth, and the generated things come to be from the earth.[7]

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5. This comment combined elements of Rashi and Ibn Ezra; the extended analysis of the absolute form of *hevel* appears to be Mendelssohn's own.

6. This theme is noted by Ibn Ezra and Ralbag.

7. Ralbag also introduced the notion of generation and degeneration in his commentary; the terminology was broadly employed in classical medieval writings to define the essence of matter.

5 The sun rises and the sun sets, and to its place there it presses on [as] it rises.

Commentary (Words)

5. **presses on** [*shoʾef*]: meaning desire and exertion °(*streben*).

Commentary (Meaning)

5. One who knows the nature of the cantillation will understand that the word *meqomo* [**to its place**] is punctuated with [a *zaqef qaṭon* which belongs to] the class of *sar gadol* [a major stop]; the word *shoʾef* [**presses on**] is punctuated with [a *tevir* belonging to] the class of *paqid* [a minor stop], which is subservient to the [following] *tipḥa*; the word *zoreaḥ* [**rises**] is punctuated with [a *merḵha* belonging to] the class of *mesharet* [no stop indicated]; and the word *hu* [**it**] is punctuated with [a *tipḥa* belonging to] the class of *sar qaṭan* [an intermediate stop].[8] The interpretation that accords with this pattern of cantillation is as follows: just as the sun rises it will set, **and to its place there it rises and presses on**, which is to say, from where the sun rises it presses on and sends its beams to where it will set.[9] In other words, the changes taking place with regard to the sun, which is the element of fire, are also circular, conjoined and linked one to the other—sunset and sunrise and sunset. This is akin to the idea expressed by those who arranged [the text of] the prayers: "[He] who removes light before darkness, and darkness before light."[10] When the sun rises in the east she immediately yearns and sends her beams and persists in her course to the place where she sets.

6 It goes towards the south and circles toward the north, in circles and circles goes the wind, and on [account of] its circles the wind returns.

Commentary (Meaning)

6. The text speaks about the wind, the element of air. The author here states that it too comes and goes in a circular fashion, for the wind is nothing but a power-

8. The terminology and classification of the cantillation employed here reflected Ashkenazic scholarship from the sixteenth-century Elijah Levita onward, and especially Solomon Hanau's *Shaʿare Zimrah* (1718). Translated literally, the classes are: *sar gadol*—senior minister; *sar qaṭan*—junior minister; *paqid*—clerk; *mesharet*—servant.

9. I.e., the sun rises and immediately yearns to reach the place where it will set. Mendelssohn's reading attempted to make sense of both the cantillation and the thematic context. Reading *el meqomo shoʾef* as one phrase and without the cantillation (viz. interpreters from the Targum to modern scholars) yields "and to its place it presses on, there it rises," losing something of the intensified circularity of Mendelssohn's rendition.

10. This line appears in the evening prayers as part of the blessings that precede the recitation of the *shemaʿ*.

ful movement of air surrounding the earth. Since the air is a fine compressible[11] substance, its movement will not be confined to one place but will go from one place to the next until it returns in a circular fashion to where it began. Thus, if the wind goes **toward the south**, it will circle around **toward the north**. He may possibly be describing the wind blowing beneath the equator, known to those who travel the seas, which follows the course of the sun. In the spring and fall [the wind blows] from east to west, and in the summer it inclines northward and in the winter it returns to the south. As such, **it goes toward the south and circles toward the north** refers both to the sun and to the wind, since they follow the same course.[12]

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7 All the streams flow into the sea, yet the sea is not full; to the place that the streams go, from there they flow back again.

Commentary (Meaning)

7. **All the streams** come from sources and springs on the mountaintops; their waters pour into each other until eventually they reach the great sea that encompasses the world. From the moment of creation until the end of time, the sea waters continue to swell at every moment, and yet we see that **the sea is not full** [and] *overflowing its banks* (Josh. 3:15) to the point that it would exceed its bounds and cover the earth. As such, the waters too **circle and circle**; they return from the sea; **from there they flow back again** to the sea, **the place** to which they **go**. This is the case either because the waters return through channels that go beneath the mountains from the sea to the springs,[13] or because many vapors and mists rise constantly from the ocean toward the sky due to the sun's heat, forming most of the clouds. The mist returns as rain and water—regarding which it is said *who summons the waters of the sea and pours them* (Amos 5:8)—and the spring waters come from the rain, and the rivers from the springs, as it is written: *you let the springs pour into streams* (Ps. 104:10). Even though ocean water is salty and rain is fresh, the mist that rises leaves behind the heavy salt particles and carries only the lighter water particles; as the Sages have said, "the waters are sweetened in the clouds."[14] You may now understand that all natural things, namely the four elements mentioned by the wise author—earth, fire,

11. Lit.: sponge-like.

12. Contra Ibn Ezra, who goes out of his way to say that this verse speaks exclusively about the wind.

13. Targum and Rashi.

14. The second explanation, beginning with the description of evaporation and cloud formation and extending to the comment on natural desalination, was drawn from Ibn Ezra. Mendelssohn revised and expanded the comment and added the verse from Psalms and the rabbinic citation; the latter appeared in numerous rabbinic sources, including Qohelet Rabbah to our verse.

wind and water—are perpetually circular, the beginning embedded in the end, and the end embedded in the beginning, like the statement in *Sefer Yeṣirah*, "Its end is imbedded in its beginning, and its beginning in its end."[15] While they are continually in flux and do not remain constant for one instant, those changes are all nonetheless circular: they return to where they began, in order to go to the place from whence they came.

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8 All things are wearying, one is not able to speak; an eye is not satisfied with seeing, nor the ear filled with hearing.

Commentary (Meaning)

8. **All things** such as these **are wearying** and tiresome from their perpetual activities and endeavors, since they never rest or repose[16] for one moment in their regular state. They are perpetually moving and changing in a circular fashion, as we have stated, to the point that a person is **not able to speak** and explain all this with language. [This is true] not only for the elements that we mentioned, but also man's spirit and senses; they too are perpetually weary, never resting, for the **eye is not satisfied with seeing** and always greatly longs to see things it has not yet seen, as is known by experience. The ear, similarly, is always listening as if it thirsts to hear, and is never satisfied so as to say "enough." As such, human senses are also perpetually active, without tranquility, and are in flux at every moment.

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9 Whatever was, that is what will be, and whatever has been done, that is what will be done; there is nothing new under the sun.

Commentary (Meaning)

9. Now, since all things are circular, **whatever was** in the past, **that is what will be** in the future, **and whatever has been done, that is what will be done. There is nothing new under the sun** because all things will return to what they were; and then they come around again like an unending circle. This is so because created beings are unable to generate even one [new] substance and add it to God's

15. *Sefer Yeṣirah*, ch. 1. Mendelssohn's citation, *naʾuṣ sofo be-roʾsho, ve-roʾsho be-sofo*, diverged from other early modern versions of that text: it changed the plural to singular and replaced the word *teḥilah* with *roʾsh*. The latter appeared to be the influence of Ibn Ezra's comments on 1:9, where he used the phrase *reʾshitam ḳe-sofam ve-sofam ḳe-reʾshitam*. Note that while *Sefer Yeṣirah* and Ibn Ezra applied this statement to *sefirot* and *galgalim*, Mendelssohn applied it to the four elements.

16. An allusion to Job 4:26: "I was not at ease, and had no repose and no rest. . . ."

creation, or to destroy [an existing substance] completely. Rather, all the activity of created beings relate to [extant] form and figure, separating and connecting things, moving what is at rest and stopping what is in motion;[17] as such, **there is nothing new under the sun**.

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10 There is something of which one might say, "See this, it is new!"—it already occurred long ago, in earlier ages.

11 There is no remembrance of earlier things, and also those that will occur later will not be remembered among those who will come later.

Commentary (Meaning)

10. If sometimes there should be a thing about which people will say "See this, it is new!"—do not heed their words, for it already existed in the past, before we entered the world.

11. However, as time goes on, earlier days will be forgotten, and as a result, they will once again say with regard to something "**this is new**!" Likewise, the things that will occur in the future **will not be remembered** in the times that come after them, and **among those who will come later**.

Up until this point in the text, Solomon's words were of a general nature. He now begins to explain in detail all the things about which people think,[18] that they are insubstantial and worthless; and [he will explain] the conclusion of all the inquiries, schemes,[19] and deliberations about things, after hearing all the arguments and counter-arguments, ideas and their rebuttals; behold, *all that remains for man—fear God and observe His commandments* (Ecc. 12:13), as the wise author concludes at the end of the book.

[End of Section I]

17. Drawn from the last lines of Ibn Ezra's introduction to *Qohelet* and his comments on this verse.

18. The first two lines of this paragraph are from Ibn Ezra.

19. *ʿeshtonot*, translated according to Mendelssohn's rendering of the word in Ps. 146:4.

[Section II]

Chapter 1:12–2:11

12 I, *qohelet*, was king over Israel in Jerusalem.

Commentary (Meaning)

12. **I, *qohelet*, was king**, one who had power and authority to do as he wishes. And I ruled over Israel, a wise nation, and in Jerusalem, which nurtures wise men.[1]

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13 I set my mind to study and to probe with wisdom all that has been done under the heavens; a wretched preoccupation[2] that God gave to humanity to be occupied with.

Commentary (Words)

13. **to probe** [*ve-latur*]: meaning inquiry and searching, as in *I considered* (Ecc. 2:3)[3] °(*untersuchen*).

a wretched preoccupation [*ʿinyan raʿ*]: In the absolute, the word *ʿinyan* appears with a *qamaṣ*, just as in *I have observed the preoccupation* [*ʿinyan*] (Ecc. 3:10). Since it is here vocalized with a *pataḥ* the word must therefore certainly be in the construct, connected to the word *raʿ* that follows it °(*Gedanken eines bösen Menschen*).[4] See the commentary on the meaning.

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1. Based on Ibn Ezra.
2. In his Commentary (Words) on Ecc. 4:8, Mendelssohn translated *ʿinyan* as *Beschäftigung*, meaning occupation or pursuit.
3. Ibn Melekh.
4. "Thoughts of an unfortunate man"; in the Commentary (Words) on 4:8, the phrase was rendered *die Beschäftigung eines schlechten Menschen*, "the occupation of a wretched man."

to be occupied with [*laʿanot bo*]: to be occupied with °(*sich damit zu tun zu machen*). And there are those who explain the meaning of [the word *laʿanot*] as reflection and thought; but the sense is the same.[5]

Commentary (Meaning)

13. In the beginning, **I set my mind to study with wisdom** and to inquire into the nature[6] of all creatures that were **[created] under the heavens**, for inquiry attracts the human mind. People readily think that [intellectual] inquiry is the true well-being for an intelligent person, *the* veritable good, the aim of all beneficence and aspirations, as if *man born of woman* [*and*] *sated with trouble* (Job 14:1) would find rest and tranquility in the embrace of human inquiry. In truth, this is not so; it is but **a wretched preoccupation**. It is of course true that God implanted this preoccupation in the human mind—that people should probe and study with wisdom all that occurs under the sun. That is why they constantly yearn for knowledge of things they do not know, and to understand and comprehend that which eludes them. But it was the intention of the Creator that man should not find tranquility and rest and true felicity in the embrace of wisdom and in the examination of created things, for inquiry itself will not give felicity to one who possesses it.

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14 I observed all the deeds that are done under the sun, and I found that all is vanity and empty thoughts.

Commentary (Words)

14. **empty thoughts** [*u-reʿut ruaḥ*]: [the word *reʿut*] is a noun in the form of the word *demut*, [derived] from verbs with a weak third radical.[7] Its meaning is [akin to] *Ephraim pursues* [*roʿeh*] *the wind* (Hos. 12:2), that is, something insubstantial like *havel*,[8] or in the opposite usage, *maintain* [*reʿeh*] *probity* (Ps. 37:3); all instances connote thought.[9] In this book we also find [the expression] *raʿyon ruaḥ* (1:17), meaning vain and empty thoughts °(*windige Gedanken*).[10] Perhaps the word *roʿeh* was applied metaphorically to the rational soul, since thought is like a pasture for the soul in which it is sustained, refined, and finds delight.

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5. This comment combines Ibn Melekh (following Ralbag) and Rashi.

6. *toledot*; Mendelssohn used the word in the sense employed by Ibn Ezra (see his commentary on Ecc. 1:12, 1:15).

7. In this case, *resh–ʿayin–heh*.

8. See above, note on 1:2.

9. Cf. his Commentary (Meaning) on 12:11.

10. This comment was substantially drawn from Ibn Ezra but considerably revised.

Commentary (Meaning)

14. After I observed and understood all that happens under the sun, I found that human thoughts regarding them are **vanity and empty thoughts**; they will yield neither profit nor success.

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15 A twisted thing cannot be made straight, and something lacking cannot be made good.

Commentary (Words)

15. **something lacking** [*ve-ḥesron*]: a noun [vocalized] according to the pattern[11] of *evyon* °(*Mangel*).

Commentary (Meaning)

15. *What benefit is there for man in all his* diligence and *toil* (above, v. 3); if something was **twisted** and disfigured in its nature, it **cannot be made straight**; and if it had **something lacking,** it **cannot be made good**, for the [divine] decree cannot be changed.[12] As such, one who thinks many thoughts in pursuit of felicity does so for naught.

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16 I said to myself: "Here I have enhanced and expanded wisdom [more] than all those who were before me over Jerusalem, and my mind has observed much wisdom and knowledge."

Commentary (Words)

16. **much** [*harbeh*]: the noun is vocalized with a *ṣereh*, while the infinitive is vocalized with a *ḥolam* as *harbot*, instead of *harboh*, with a *ḥolam*. [The infinitive] also appears with a *qamaṣ*, as in *harbah arbeh* (Gen. 3:16, 16:10), which is irregular. The noun is only found in the singular but is used also for the plural, since it means "a lot of something," as in *for they may be many* [*harbeh*] °(Ecc. 11:8).[13]

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11. *peles*; Mendelssohn used the term interchangeably with *mishqal* (cf. Commentary (Words) on 1:2, 14). This comment was based on Radaq, cited in Ibn Melekh.

12. That is, the natural order of things cannot be altered. The comment was based loosely on Ibn Ezra.

13. Ibn Ezra, with substantial additions.

Commentary (Meaning)

16. Then I thought to myself: "Here, I have increased wisdom in two ways—by enhancing and expanding." For with regard to a wise individual who produces a novel understanding with his intellect, one would say that he enhanced wisdom. And with regard to one who teaches this wisdom to others, one would say that he expanded wisdom. I said: "**I have enhanced and expanded wisdom [more] than all** that was done by the kings **who were before me** in **Jerusalem**."

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17 I set my mind to know wisdom and knowledge, madness and foolishness, and I know that these too are empty thoughts.[14]

Commentary (Words)

17. **madness** [*holelot*]: that is, insanity, a departure from reason;[15] °(*Tollheit*).

foolishness [*sikhlut*]: according to the *masorah*, whenever this word meant foolishness it was written with the letter *samekh* except for one instance in which it is written with the letter *sin* [namely, our verse]—**knowledge, madness and foolishness**.[16] It connotes the absence of reason °(*Narrheit*).

Commentary (Meaning)

17. Now that I set my mind to know the difference between **wisdom** and **madness and foolishness**, and what benefit a wise man might have over the fool and the madman—**I know that these too are empty thoughts**, for the benefit of wisdom offers a person no true felicity and well-being.[17]

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18 For with much wisdom is much vexation, and one who increases knowledge increases misery.

Commentary (Meaning)

18. The more a person probes with wisdom,[18] the more his vexation and misery. This may be due to the limitations of his knowledge and grasp; he becomes

14. On the translation of *ra'yon ruaḥ* as "empty thoughts," see Mendelssohn's comment on 1:14.
15. Rashi and Ibn Melekh.
16. Ibn Melekh.
17. *haṣlaḥah*.
18. Alluding back to 1:13.

wearied with his life (Gen. 27:46) when he sees that all his effort and toil with regard to wisdom and knowledge will not bring him to his goal, for the truth *is deep, who can discover it* (Ecc. 7:24)?[19] Or it may be due to the vicissitudes that he sees in the world, in which the ways of Providence are concealed from all humans with regard to the accidents that befall man, be he saintly or evil—an issue that has roused many faithful individuals, and is also raised at length in this book. It may [also] be due to the envy of those who *hate and are hostile to* (Gen. 49:23) men of wisdom without cause. The fool, meanwhile, is spared most of these miseries, either because of his lack of sensitivity—as the Sages have said "a fool is not aware"—or perhaps because he is less susceptible to accidents and mishaps, as they said "a fool is not harmed."[20] All this is enough to make the intelligent soul aware that it will not find true blessedness in human inquiry.

19. Mendelssohn explained Ecc. 7:24 as meaning that certain things can be grasped only with great difficulty and danger.

20. The second statement appeared in Shab. 13b and elsewhere; it was taken to mean that a fool is so limited in his understanding that he may be unaware even when he has been harmed (cf. Rashi). The first statement was not rabbinic but from the medieval *Mivḥar ha-Peninim* (18:6), a book of aphorisms attributed to Solomon ibn Gabirol and translated into Hebrew by Judah ibn Tibbon. The line there read: "a fool is unaware of [his] disgrace."

Chapter 2

2:1 I said to myself: "Come, now! I will try you with merriment, and you will observe good"; that too is vanity.

Commentary (Words)

1. **I said to myself** [*amarti*]: this means thought.[1]

Come, now [*lekhah-na*]: this is an expression of exhortation and inducement to action ˚(*Wohlan*!). And since going involves activity and sitting involves inactivity, the notion of activity was indicated with the word for going.[2]

I will try you [*anassekhah*]: this is in the second person feminine; he is speaking to his soul,[3] saying "I will try you."[4]

Commentary (Meaning)

1. Since I observed that wisdom does not give man well-being and felicity, **I said**: I will cease from engaging in wisdom, and will feast endlessly.[5] And so I thought to myself: "**Come, now! I will try you** to see if you find the true good and felicity in merriment, feasting, and pleasure." **But that too is vanity**; there is neither true well-being nor the hoped-for felicity in various pleasures. Rather, if a man engages in a great deal of endless enjoyment, pleasure, and levity, he will ultimately become *disgusted with his life* (Gen. 27:46) and his soul will spurn merriment.

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1. Ibn Melekh.
2. Ibid.
3. *nefesh*, which is a feminine noun.
4. Ibn Ezra and Ibn Melekh.
5. This last sentence was from Rashi.

2 Of levity I said "It's mad!" Of merriment [I said] "What does this do?"

Commentary (Words)

2. **mad** [*mehola*l]: this means insane °(*du bist toll*).[6]

what does this [*mah zoh*]: this is vocalized with a *ḥolam* to indicate the feminine.[7]

Commentary (Meaning)

2. He will then say, regarding **levity**, that it is the behavior of those who lack knowledge, and regarding **merriment** he will say **"what does this do?"** What good will it bring to man—it will give us neither felicity nor intelligence.

3 I considered: to entice my body with wine, [while] my mind guides [itself] with wisdom, also grasping folly, until I observe what is the good for men that they should do under the heaven, in the few days of their life.

Commentary (Words)

3. **to entice** [*limshokh*]: to indulge and guide.[8]

guide [*noheg*]: [guiding] itself, this being a transitive verb.[9]

Commentary (Meaning)

3. When I observed that wisdom alone would *increase misery* (Ecc. 1:18), and levity alone would not be felicitous, I searched for a way to conjoin them: **to entice** and indulge my body with wine, for *wine makes life merry* (Ecc. 10:19), with **my mind guiding itself with wisdom**, but also engaging in foolish deeds—this being worldly desire—like the deeds of a man in doubt, unsure where *to find tranquility* and contentment *for his soul* (Jer. 6:16). He counsels himself: grasp

6. Ibn Ezra's comment on 2:12 alludes to this reading.

7. The pronoun "this" is here spelled *zayin–heh*, normally masculine, although it is pointed with a *ḥolam*, indicating a reading of *zo*, the feminine pronoun (usually spelled *zayin–vav*).

8. Rashi and Ibn Melekh.

9. Ibn Ezra and Ibn Melekh.

both this and that[10] **until I observe** what may be the desired and hoped-for good for man.[11]

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4 I undertook great deeds, built myself houses, and planted vineyards for myself.

5 I made myself gardens and orchards, and planted in them all manner of fruit trees.

6 I made myself pools of water from which to irrigate a forest sprouting with trees.

Commentary (Words)

5. **gardens** [*gannot*]: [this noun is] from the root *gimel–nun–nun* °(*bedecken*)[12] on account of the trees whose branches shelter the person sitting in its shade °(*Baumgarten*).

orchards [*pardesim*]: this is a noun with four root letters, and its meaning is known even in Greek and Latin,[13] namely, that it is a fine garden, apportioned according to arranged forms °(*Lustgarten*).

6. **pools of water** [*berekhot mayim*]: water gathered in cavities in the ground °(*Teiche* or *Cisternen*).[14]

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7 I acquired male and female slaves, and I had home-born slaves; also a great many possessions—cattle and sheep—more than those who were before me in Jerusalem.

Commentary (Words)

7. **possessions—cattle and sheep** [*miqneh baqar va-ṣoʾn*]: sheep and cattle are called possessions [*miqneh*], for they are a person's acquisitions [*qinyan*], his capital and business.[15]

10. Alluding to Ecc. 7:18
11. Based on Ibn Ezra, with changes and clarifications.
12. I.e., to cover or shelter.
13. *paradeisos* (Greek), and *paradisus* (Latin).
14. Based on Ibn Melekh.
15. Ibn Melekh.

8 I also amassed for myself silver and gold and royal treasures of provinces; I acquired male and female singers, the luxuries of commoners, and many seized women.

Commentary (Words)

8. **royal treasures of provinces** [*segullat melakhim ve-hamedinot*]: *segulah* is something delightful and precious to be guarded in a treasury, in which one exalts and rejoices, and which is limited to certain regions.[16]

many seized women [*shiddah ve-shiddot*]: it would appear that these are captive women who are taken by force, and the verse refers to many women and not just one °(*viele Sklavinnen*), as in *many damsels* [*raḥam raḥamatayim*] (Judg. 5:30), indicating not one, but many.[17]

9 I became greater than all those who were before me in Jerusalem; my wisdom stood by me.

Commentary (Meaning)

9. **my wisdom stood by me**: [my wisdom] helped me[18] do things that had not been done **before me in Jerusalem**.

10 Whatever my eyes desired, I did not deprive them; I did not withhold my heart from any merriment, for my heart was merry from all my toil; and this was my portion for all my toil.

Commentary (Words)

10. **deprive** [*aṣalti*]: withhold.[19]

Commentary (Meaning)

10. **I did not withhold my heart from any merriment** [*lo manaʿti et libbi mi-kol simḥah*]: For all his strenuous toil, man's only benefit is a merry heart; so why would I **withhold my heart from merriment**?

16. Based on Ibn Ezra, with additions.
17. Ibn Ezra with editing.
18. Rashi.
19. Ibn Melekh.

11 So I turned to all my works that my hands had done, and my toil that I toiled to do, and lo, all is vanity and empty thoughts, and there is no benefit under the sun.

Commentary (Meaning)

11. After I had done all these things, I sat and contemplated them to see whether human well-being and felicity can be found therein, **and lo, all is vanity and empty thoughts**; they contain no reliable and lasting good **under the sun**.

[End of Section II]

[Section IV]

Chapter 3:1–4:3

3:1 For everything there is a moment, a time for every matter under the heavens.

2 A time to give birth, a time to die; a time to plant, a time to uproot what has been planted.

3 A time to kill and a time to heal; a time to tear down and a time to build.

4 A time to weep and a time to laugh; a time to mourn and a time to dance.

5 A time to cast stones and a time to gather stones; a time to embrace and a time to refrain from embracing.

6 A time to seek and a time to lose; a time to keep and a time to discard.

7 A time to tear and a time to sew; a time to be silent and a time to speak.

8 A time to love and a time to hate; a time for war and a time for peace.

9 What benefit has he who does something in that he toils?

Commentary (Meaning)

1. [The author] proceeds to explain on the basis of experience and discernment that everything [happens] by primordial decree determined by God. He says

that everything has a particular **moment** and a set **time**, and man lacks the ability to defer that moment or to hasten its arrival.

2. **A time to give birth**: He began by mentioning man's beginning and end; but times are allotted for seeds and plants, and not only for men.[1]

3. **A time to kill and a time to heal**: He did not say ". . . a time to resurrect" since this has no allotted time in the normal course of things and will only occur in a miraculous fashion at the time of resurrection in the world to come, as is known.[2] [The words **a time to heal**] refer to scientific accomplishments, for even they have an allotted time. Sometimes the well-trained doctor works to cure an illness with *wisdom, knowledge, and skill* (Ecc. 2:21) to no avail—would it only not cause harm! At other times, a *medical charlatan* (Job 13:4) will thwart his treatment and choose a bizarre and unscientific approach but will nevertheless cure the illness—for the **time to heal** has arrived.

a time to tear down: In other words, so too the act of building—all is decreed.

4. [**A time to weep**:] A time when a man bursts into tears, without any idea what happened to him.

a time to laugh:—when he laughs at everything; and likewise **a time to mourn and a time to dance**.

5. **A time to cast**: Even a chance occurrence[3] has its [allotted] time, as with **a time to cast stones** for which one has no need, **and a time to gather stones** that had been thrown.[4]

a time to embrace: Even the desire that is planted in the human heart has a particular moment, namely [the desire] to embrace the woman who lies in his bosom; or [similarly, a time] **to refrain from embracing**.[5]

6. He goes on to explain this principle with reference to the particulars of human movements and thoughts, their loves and hates, their comings and goings. All have a time that is set by decree; they can neither be hastened by a diligent individual nor delayed by a lazy one.

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1. Ibn Ezra.
2. Based on Ibn Melekh.
3. *miqreh*.
4. Ibn Ezra.
5. Ibid.

9. Since this is the case, **what benefit** is there for one who **does something**, with regard to the thing upon which **he toils**, since his diligence is for naught.

---

10 I observed the preoccupation that God gave to humanity to be occupied with.

Commentary (Meaning)

10. For an explanation of the words **preoccupation** [*ʿinyan*] and **to be occupied with** [*laʿanot bo*], see above in the Commentary (Words) to chapter one [v. 13].

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11 He made everything right in its time; he also put the world in their mind, but without man failing to discover what it is that God has done, from beginning to end.

Commentary (Meaning)

11. The word *yafeh* [**right**] is punctuated with [a *munaḥ* which belongs to] the class of *mesharet* and is thus conjoined to [the word] *be-ʿitto* [**in its time**].[6] The meaning is that in its allotted time, that thing is appropriate and right. Everything that God made is **right in its time**, including death and illness, poverty and misery, hunger and war; all of them are evils in our eyes [as we are] deficient in knowledge and cannot grasp and appreciate the relationship between things and time and place. However, if it were possible for a person to comprehend the works of God *from the smallest to the greatest* (Jer. 6:13) with all their attendant connections to time and place, he would certainly know that no evil descends from heaven,[7] for God **made everything right in its time**.

He also put the world in their mind: God impressed upon the minds of people a love of the world, such that one will toil and another will become wise; one will accumulate capital, another will build homes, and someone else will plant vineyards; one will love and another will hate, etc. And with all the exertion, effort, toil, and diligence in temporal matters, they will not escape what has been decreed and act in any way other than God's desire and primordial will. Even if they think and imagine that they can exercise their own will rather than that of heaven, in the end they will surely discover that what God decreed is what will be, **from beginning to end**.

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6. Mendelssohn was once again parsing the masoretic cantillation.
7. See Gen. R. 51 (3).

The meaning of **without failing to discover** is that he will surely discover, for if [the author] had said "without ever discovering" it would be a negative statement; now that he said "without failing to discover" it is positive, as if he has said "it is impossible that we would not discover." It is thus in German °(*ohne dass nicht*).

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12 I know that there is nothing good for them, except to be merry and to do what is good in life.

13 Also, that when a man eats and drinks and takes pleasure in his toil, it is a gift of God.

14 I know that all that God does is always what will be; to it one cannot add and from it one cannot take away; God has acted so that men may fear him.

Commentary (Meaning)

12–14. Since this principle[8] is true and correct, I know that both the statements I made [in vv. 12 and 13] are true, without one contradicting and opposing the other. I know that what is good for man is **to be merry and to do what is good in life**, and I also know that this good is not entirely in man's control; rather, **it is a gift of God**, since I observed that even the smallest of human movements and actions are determined by God's decree. For **all that God does** and decrees, that it should be [a certain way]—to it **one cannot add and from it one cannot take away**. If so, surely the enjoyment one gets from toil and the pleasure one takes in the good is not in man's control, for this too is from God. And [God] **has acted**—He did not want created being[s] to be able **to add** to His creation or **take away** from it so that they would not come to rely on their own actions, but rather that they **may fear him**.

[Another possibility is] that the wise author was speaking of the One who decreed, stating that even the fear of God was primordially decreed, this [being the meaning of] **God has acted so that men may fear him**. And even though this is not actually true, as the Sages taught when they said "Everything is in the hands of heaven, except for the fear of heaven,"[9] I have already told you that not everything stated in this book is the true opinion of Solomon; rather, [some of them] are arguments that occur to one who presumes to be wise and relies on

8. I.e., that all human actions unfold within earthly bounds fixed and set into place by God.
9. Ber. 33b.

his own cursory understanding. The author ponders these issues as one who deliberates within himself out of a strong desire to know the truth, until at the end he says *the end of the matter—everything has been heard; fear God*, etc. (Ecc. 12:13).

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15 Whatever was, already has been, and whatever will be has already been before; and God aims at [the] succession [of events].

Commentary (Meaning)

15. **Whatever was**: What happened in the past already was and cannot be changed. So too the things that are to happen in the future—this too is determined by God[10] as if it already happened. For God has already decreed that it should happen. [Whether we are speaking of] the past or the future—there is no difference in the truth of their existence, for one is past and was in existence, while the other is in the future, and will be an existent. And when its moment and time arrive, the future will become the past. However, God wanted things to arrive and unfold in sequence, as if the future will always pursue the past. And this is the meaning of **and God aims at succession**—that according to His primordial decree, they happen successively,[11] all of them connected and attached to each other like links on a chain, and they follow one after another in eternal succession.

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16 And furthermore I observed under the sun that in the place of justice there is evil, and in the place of equity there is evil.

Commentary (Words)

16. **there is evil** [*shammah ha-rashaʿ*]: [the vocalization of the word] *reshaʿ* does not [normally] change at a pause, but it does so here like other nouns of the same pattern, as for example *shemaʿ* [which becomes] *be-ṣilṣele shamaʿ* (Ps. 150:5) and *zeraḥ* [which becomes] *zaraḥ*;[12] [as such, the word *rashaʿ*] is a noun[13] °(*Bosheit*).

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10. Recalling Gen. 41:32.

11. *yavo ha-ʾeḥad be-sur ha-ʾaḥer*; see *Guide* I:73 (eleventh premise).

12. When biblical words whose first consonants are vocalized with a *segol* appear at a pause, there is generally a shift in vocalization, the *segol* being replaced with a *qamaṣ*. The word *reshaʿ* was among the exceptions to that rule, normally retaining its *segol*. Our verse, however, provided an exception to the exception, with *reshaʿ* changing to *rashaʿ*. Mendelssohn's comment sought to alert the reader to a possible misinterpretation of the verse, since *rashaʿ* is also an adjective meaning "an evil person"; as such, he explained the unusual vocalization with an eye to ensuring the word *rashaʿ* at the end of the verse was read as an abstract noun.

13. Ibn Melekh; the examples were added by Mendelssohn.

Commentary (Meaning)

16. **And furthermore, I observed under the sun**: The author speaks about the immortality of the soul after the death of the body, and about reward and punishment in the world-to-come. He said: **I observed under the sun** and behold, *the earth is filled with* oppression and *injustice* with *the wicked devouring one who is more righteous* (Gen. 6:13, Hab. 1:13); the **place** from which we expected **justice** is itself a place of injustice; and so too **the place of equity**. The recompense for evil, for those committing it, is called justice. And the recompense for good, for those who perform it, is called equity. Evil is the opposite of both.

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17 I thought to myself: God will judge the righteous and the wicked—for every matter and every deed has a time there.

Commentary (Meaning)

17. **I thought to myself**: After being astounded by the sight of *the betrayer betraying and the ravager ravaging, and their prosperous ways* (Isa. 21:2, Jer. 12:1) *and pious men growing ever weaker* (Isa. 57:1, 2 Sam. 3:1) with their days ending in grief; and knowing that *all the ways* of God *are just, true and upright is He* (Deut. 32:4)—I thought to myself: it must be that **God will judge the righteous and the wicked** at some later time. And even though this [judgment] is delayed, it will come in due time, for there is a time for everything, and for every deed there will be judgment and an accounting[14] in the world-to-come. In truth, the tranquility of the wicked and the sufferings of saintly individuals in this world are absolute proof of the immortality of the soul following death, for not even a stubborn person would deny that *the judge of all the earth is a faithful God without deceit* (Gen. 18:25, Deut. 32:4). And were He not to effect justice there [in the world-to-come], *vindicating the righteous and condemning the wicked* (Deut. 25:1), then it would be impossible not to attribute deceit and oppression to Him, heaven forbid. As such, anyone who believes in the existence of God, that He is righteous and *loves equity and justice* (Ps. 33:5), cannot escape one of two possibilities: he must either believe in the immortality of the soul and in reward and punishment in the world-to-come, or he must deny that which is plainly evident, [claiming] that one cannot find *a righteous man who perishes* (Ecc. 7:15) and a wicked man succeeding in his evil ways. The wise author spoke briefly here, but in the eighth and ninth chapters of this book he preached at length about this subject, with proofs that would be accepted as straightforward and correct by an intelligent person.

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14. *din u-devarim*, a rabbinic phrase usually appearing in matters that are personal and contractual.

18 I thought to myself: as to men saying "God chose them," [one can] observe that they are really beasts themselves.

Commentary (Words)

18. **saying** [*divrat*]: meaning speech.[15]

chose [*le-varam*]: its verbal root is *bet–resh–resh* [to select, separate]; the letter *bet* should have been vocalized with a short *qamaṣ*,[16] while the letter *resh* should have a *dagesh* in the pattern of *le-hummam* (Deut. 2:15),[17] since the *shuruq*[18] and the short *qamaṣ* are related [variants] in the basis of the language.[19] But since the letter *resh* cannot accept a *dagesh*, the *bet* is vocalized with a long *qamaṣ*, with a [hidden] quiescent [letter] compensating for [the absence of] the *dagesh*.[20] It would have been proper for the short *qamaṣ* °(or the *shuruq*) to change to a *ḥolam*, which is the progenitor of the short *qamaṣ*, to read *le-voram*, as in the words *borit* (Jer. 2:22), *u-moraq* (Lev. 6:21), *ve-hinneh soraf* (Lev. 10:16).

Alternatively, *le-varam* may be a verb in the past tense, meaning "for those whom God had chosen," even though one does not usually find [the prepositional prefixes] *bet*, *kaf*, *lamed*, and *mem* utilized in verbs in the past tense. Nevertheless, we sometimes find these verb forms accompanied by the prefix *heh* used in the sense of "that," and likewise the preposition *bet*, as in *that David had prepared* [*ba-hekhin*] *for it* (2 Chron. 1:4), *all that* [*Samuel*] *had dedicated* [*ha-hiqdish*] (1 Chron. 26:28), and *that were present* [*ha-nimṣe'u*] (1 Chron. 29:17). As such, the letter *lamed* in *le-varam* can also appear in place of "that."

It may also be that this word belongs to the group of verbs with a weak third radical *heh*,[21] as in "chose [*beru*] one of the men" (1 Sam. 17:8), and this is the correct one.[22]

15. Ibn Melekh, based on Radaq *Sefer ha-Shorashim*, s.v. *dalet–bet–resh*; most exegetes read the phrase *'al divrat bene ha-'adam* as "with regard to men" or "on account of men."

16. *qamaṣ ḥaṭuf*, in modern terminology referred to as *qamaṣ qaṭan*.

17. The second consonant of the word would normally carry a *dagesh ḥazaq*, indicating a doubling of the sound as in the word *le-hummam*.

18. In modern terminology, *qubbuṣ*.

19. *aḥim hem mi-toledot ha-safah*. The short *qamaṣ* and the *shuruq* are phonetically related variants of the short vowel /u/.

20. This linguistic notion, that Hebrew words contained both written and hidden quiescent letters, originated with Judah ibn Hayyuj (d.c. 1010) and was adopted by Ibn Ezra. In this instance, the fact that the letter *resh* does not accept a *dagesh* was compensated by the lengthening of the vowel that preceded it, meaning that the *bet* was vocalized with a long *qamaṣ*. According to Hayyuj and Ibn Ezra, the compensation for the absence of the *dagesh* and the appearance of the long *qamaṣ* indicated a hidden *aleph* that reflected the open syllable, such that the word was to be properly understood as *le-ba(')-ram*.

21. Meaning that the verbal root is *bet–resh–heh*, serving as an alternate form of *barar*.

22. This entire note is based upon Ibn Melekh, who drew upon the commentary of Ibn Ezra. Mendelssohn expanded the comment slightly and added a number of the examples.

Commentary (Meaning)

18. **I thought** further:[23] This proof is surely incontrovertible. Some people, however, would say that simply discerning the nature of the soul would lead us to believe in its immortality. For God set man above all other creatures, and this is [the meaning of] **as to men saying God chose them**, since they would say that God separated them and chose them from all earthly creations[24] to grace them with knowledge, understanding, and intelligence.[25] However, I see that this is not the case, for **they are really beasts themselves**, which is to say that people who are not governed by divine providence and are left to their own devices are indistinguishable from beasts. For this reason the verse repeated its words, [**they are**] **really beasts themselves** [*she-hem behemah hemmah la-hem*], as we have explained: when they are left on their own, they are like earthly beasts.

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19 For men are an accident, and beasts are an accident—they are both an accident—and as this one perishes, the other perishes, and both have the same spirit; the superiority of man over the beast is nil, for all is vanity.

20 Everything goes to one place; everything came from dust, and everything returns to dust.

Commentary (Words)

19. **accident** [*miqreh*], etc.: R. Joseph Kimhi wrote that all three [times that the word appears in our verse they] are vocalized with a *segol*, and that they are in the absolute; had they been in the construct, they would have been vocalized with a *ṣere*, as per the grammatical rule. They appear thus [with a *segol*] in the most accurate [biblical] texts.[26]

Commentary (Meaning)

19. If we judge man and his nature on the basis of what we see in this world,[27] we see that men are but an accident in the world and have no permanent

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23. Mendelssohn reformulated the lemma to read: *amarti ʿod el libi*.

24. This one line appeared in Ibn Ezra's commentary on the verse.

25. This phrase was taken from the daily liturgy, namely the fourth benediction of the *ʿamidah*.

26. Ibn Melekh. The grammatical point sought to eschew a reading of the verse as "the *accident of* [= that befalls or affects] man and the *accident of* beasts. . . ." The comment does not appear in R. Joseph Kimhi's extant writings, but Ibn Melekh had a manuscript of his commentary on Tanakh (see his introduction to *Mikhlal Yofi*). The substance of the comment also appeared in Radaq's *Sefer ha-Shorashim*, s.v. *quf–resh–heh*.

27. I.e., in the absence of the notion of the immortality of the soul.

substance.[28] Beasts too are an accident, and **they are both an accident** with regard to all the vicissitudes that affect them.

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21 Who knows the spirit of men, whether it goes higher, and the spirit of beasts, whether it descends lower to the ground?

Commentary (Meaning)

21. Some exegetes thought that the meaning of this was "who knows if the spirit of man will rise, etc."[29] But this interpretation is counter to the cantillation because the word [*bene*] *ha-ʾadam* **[men]** is punctuated with [a *zaqef qaṭon*, which belongs to] the class of *sar gadol* [a major stop], while the word *yodeaʿ* [**knows**] is punctuated with [a *reviʿa*, which is] its *paqid* [a minor stop]. If those exegetes were correct, then the words **the spirit of men** would be more connected to what followed, and it would have been more fitting for the word *yodeaʿ* to be punctuated with a *zaqef*, as is known to an expert in the cantillation.[30] According to the cantillation, this is the interpretation of the verse: **Who knows**—who understands and comprehends the nature of **the spirit of men**, if it **goes higher**, and the nature of **the spirit of beasts**, if it **descends lower to the ground**. This is because an examination of the soul is exceedingly subtle and deep, and it is difficult to draw proof from it to argue that man is specially chosen among all creatures, as men like to state. From the point of view of the body, they are equal in all their accidents.[31]

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22 I observed that there is no greater good than for man to rejoice in his deeds, for that is his portion; for who will lead him to observe what will be afterward.

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28. *ʿaṣmut qayyam*; see *ʿIqqarim*, IV:29. Zeev Harvey has noted that Mendelssohn was using the term "accident" in the Leibnizian sense of being a contingent being or entity, rendered in German as *zufällige*.

29. This reading of the verse is the first of two offered by Ralbag, although he ultimately opted for a different interpretation; it was also the reading adopted by Sforno.

30. Mendelssohn analyzed the cantillation to explore two possibilities for reading the first part of the verse: (1) "Who knows whether the spirit of men goes higher" or (2) "Who knows the spirit of men, whether it goes higher." The difference hinged upon the relative quality of the cantillation marking the words *yodeaʿ* and *ha-ʾadam*; since the more significant pause fell upon the latter word, the masoretic text indicated that "the spirit of men" should be read with what preceded it and offset from what followed. For this reason Mendelssohn adopted the second reading.

31. Mendelssohn read vv. 18–21 as dismissing the notion that one can derive an argument regarding the immortality of the soul from the nature of the human soul itself. Despite the fact that man is a speaking being and hence differentiated from animals, he is indistinguishable from animals in light of their shared existence as accidents.

Commentary (Words)

22. **what** [*be-meh*]: the letter *bet* is vocalized with a *sheva*, though it would be normally vocalized with a *pataḥ*.[32]

Commentary (Meaning)

22. As such, were it not for the correct proof mentioned above regarding the immortality of the soul and the reward in the world to come, I would **observe that there is no greater good for man** other than **to rejoice in his deeds** while he is still alive, for this is **his portion**. **For who will lead him to observe what will be afterward**. Isn't the perception of the soul deep and in need of proofs that are incomprehensible except to the greatest of scholars? The accidents of the body are the same to both man and beast, and as such, how will we know what will be afterwards? In the verses that follow, the author will return to the convincing argument that he had mentioned, namely *the tears of the oppressed, with none to comfort them* (Ecc. 4:1) in this world. There we find an absolute proof for the immortality of the soul and the reward in the world to come, as we have explained.

I have already told you not to pay attention to the chapter divisions, for we do not know who applied them, and any thinking person will see that he sometimes paused where the [text] continues, and vice versa. It already occurred to me to change the section breaks in line with the meaning,[33] but I left [the text] as it was in order to make it easier for the reader, so that he need not weary himself finding [the verse] that he seeks. However, the reader should not pause in the middle of the discourse—particularly in a deliberation such as the one here—but rather move swiftly to its end. In this instance, it appears that the theme extends until the fourth verse of the next chapter.

32. Ibn Melekh.
33. I.e., the content.

Chapter 4

4:1 I further observed all the oppressions that are done under the sun; the tears of the oppressed, with none to comfort them; and the power of their oppressors, with none to comfort them.

Commentary (Meaning)

1. [The author] now returns to the correct and incontrovertible proof concerning the immortality of the soul and the [ultimate] reward, which was already mentioned above. He said: discerning the nature of the soul will not relieve man of doubt. But **I further** saw **all the oppressions that are done under the sun** under the governance of a *faithful God whose eyes are too pure to look upon evil* (Deut. 32:4, Hab. 1:13) and yet, I observe that the oppressed weep and sigh with broken hearts **with none to comfort them**. And with the power and force of their hands, **their oppressors** compel them to do whatever they wish, and [the oppressed] are under their control **with none to comfort them**, and certainly no savior or someone to sustain [them]. If so, there is no doubt that the matter is as we said, *for every matter and every deed has a time there* (Ecc. 3:17), and *God will bring* the oppressor and the oppressed *to judgment* (Ecc. 12:14) and give them their recompense.

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2 I extol the dead who have already died, more than the living who are still alive.

Commentary (Words)

2. **extol** [*ve-shabbeaḥ*]: [this verb is] in the infinitive, replacing the present tense.

still [*ʿadenah*]: it means "until now," and likewise *ʿaden* (v. 3) means "until now" with the *heh* left off ʿ(*bisher*).[1]

Commentary (Meaning)

2. Were it not thus, **I would extol**[2] **the dead who have already died more than the living who are alive** until now.

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3 Better than both is he who has not yet come to be, who has not seen the evil that has been done under the sun.

Commentary (Meaning)

3. **Better than both** I would praise **he who** still **has not come to be**, and **who has not seen the evil doing that has been done under the sun**. God certainly did not create man [and place him] on earth to cause him misfortune or to seek retribution from him, heaven forbid, but rather with great loving-kindness, in order to suffuse him with His goodness.[3] And where is [man's] good if he were to live but briefly only to observe *the tears of the oppressed* (above, v. 1), or to be *abused and downtrodden* himself (Deut. 28:33), afterwards perishing like a beast[4] and suffering complete perdition after which there is no survival?[5] These are not the ways of God; it must be that *God will judge the righteous and the wicked* (above, 3:17), as we have already stated. This ends the discourse on the immortality of the soul.

[End of Section IV]

1. Ibn Melekh, with abbreviation.
2. Mendelssohn recast the verse by changing the infinitive absolute *ve-shabbeaḥ* to the subjunctive *hayiti meshabbeaḥ*.
3. This phrase echoed *Guide* I:5.
4. Alluding to 3:19 above.
5. Mendelssohn's phrasing echoed Maimonides' *Mishneh Torah*, Teshuvah 8:5.

[Section V]

Chapter 4:4–4:16

4 I observed that all toil and all skillful activity come from one's envy of another; this too is vanity and empty thoughts.

Commentary (Words)

4. **toil** [*ʿamal*]: °(*Fleiß, industria*) [diligence, industriousness].

skillful activity [*ḳishron ha-maʿaseh*]: °(*Geschicklichkeit der Kunst*) [artistic skill].

Commentary (Meaning)

4. **I observed**: [The author] speaks here of the felicity of the state. In the opinion of some statesmen, a state is felicitous and well-off if its members toil industriously in every craft and their work is done with artistic skill, in the finest and most beautiful possible manner, and is pleasing to merchants. This is the opinion of most kings and ministers of our day.[1] And it seems that King Solomon was also partial to this, as is implied in our verse. But now he observed that this too is vanity. For this felicity is founded upon **one's envy of another** in that one prides himself on surpassing his fellow man with his home and clothing, his possessions and jewels, his treasures and his haughty finery.[2] When you rouse the residents of the state to **toil** and **skillful activity** you inevitably inflame the fire of jealousy and haughtiness in their hearts, and your gain is offset by your

1. While it is not clear which statesmen Mendelssohn had in mind, this view of refined goods and luxury was familiar to him from David Hume's essay "Of Luxury" that appeared in *Essays and Treatises on Several Subjects* (1753) [originally published as "Of Refinement in the Arts" in *Essays, Moral and Political* (1741)]. Mendelssohn owned the German translation of this volume, *Vermischte Schriften über die Handlung, die Manufacturen und die andern Quellen des Reichthums und der Macht eines Staats* (1754); see pp. 38–40. See also Mendelssohn's discussion of luxury in his postscript to Exodus below, pp. 467–70.

2. *rehavav*; Mendelssohn translated *rehavim* (Ps. 40:5) as *Hoffarts Pracht*.

loss.[3] It would be better for them to be content [with what they have] and neither seek luxuries nor act arrogantly toward each other. They should reject *objects of enticing appearance* (Isa. 2:16) and then there is no place for such artistic skill.[4]

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5 The fool presses his hands together, and eats his flesh.

6 Better is a hand full with ease, than fists full with toil and empty thoughts.

Commentary (Words)

5. **presses his hands together** [*ḥoveq*]: °(*zusammendrücken*).

6. **full** [*melo*]: this is a noun.[5]

hand [*ḳhaf*]: the palm of the hand is called *ḳhaf* since it is cupped [*ḳefufah*].[6]

Commentary (Meaning)

5. A diligent person will abhor the idler by saying: **the fool presses his hands together** and eats whatever he has without toiling to supplement it, as if he **eats his flesh**.[7]

6. The idler will respond: it is **better** for me to make do with little, with **my hand full with ease** and tranquility, than **fists full with toil** and exertion—like the diligent person who toils all day—or with **empty thoughts**—as when he puts his mind to thinking useless thoughts about the next day, namely what he will earn and how he will provide for himself, and the like.[8]

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7 I further observed the vanity under the sun.

8 There is one [person alone] without another, without even child or sibling, and no end to his toil, yet his eyes are not sated with wealth;

3. M. Avot 5:11–12.
4. Mendelssohn was not wont to disparage artisanship and aesthetics; his concern here was with the deleterious effects of pursuing things deemed to be luxuries.
5. Ibn Melekh.
6. Ibid.
7. Based on Ibn Ezra.
8. Ibid.

[he says:] for whom do I toil and deny myself of good?—this too is vanity and a wretched occupation.

Commentary (Words)

8. **a wretched occupation** [*ʿinyan raʿ*]: that is, the occupation of a wretched man, since [*ʿinyan*] is vocalized with a *pataḥ* and is [grammatically] a construct; [however,] the *masorah* has the word without a *pataḥ*.[9] [In German, the phrase could be rendered] °(*die Beschäftigung eines schlechten Menschen*).[10]

Commentary (Meaning)

7–8. [The author] now speaks of love of society, and that it is good for man to seek assistance.[11] He says: **There is one [person alone] without another** for him, that is, without a wife and without children.

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9 Two are better than one; they have more benefit for their toil.

10 If they [together] should fall, one will raise his friend; alas for one who is alone and falls, with no one to raise him up.

11 If two lie together, they will be warm; [if] one is alone, how will he be warm?

12 If one attacks, two can stand against him; a three-ply cord will not readily snap.

Commentary (Words)

10. **should fall** [*yippolu*]: the language is plural even though the verse speaks about one of them;[12] see the Commentary (Meaning).

alas [*ve-ʾilo*]: meaning, woe unto him.[13]

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9. Ibn Melekh. Although there is evidence of some biblical texts that vocalized *ʿinyan* with a *qamaṣ*, this vocalization does not appear in the masoretic apparatus itself.

10. See the Commentary (Words) on 1:13 and n. 4.

11. Mendelssohn returned time and again to this theme, namely the need for society as imperative to human development through its promotion of benevolence and mutual assistance. See "Sendschreiben an den Herrn Magister Lessing in Leipzig," *JubA*, 2:87–90; *Phädon*, *JubA*, 3,1:110–12; and *Jerusalem*, *JubA*, 8:109–11, 122–25.

12. Ibn Melekh.

13. Ibid.

12. **attacks** [*yitqefo*]: this is a transitive verb, like *you overpower him* [*titqefehu*] *forever* (Job 14:20); it is missing the letter *heh*, [abbreviated from] *yitqefehu*.[14]

a three-ply cord [*ve-ha-ḥuṭ ha-meshullash*]: a cord of three strings.[15]

Commentary (Meaning)

9. Since the monarch is keen to foster industriousness and diligence, he encouraged the men and women of his land to pair off so that **they have more benefit for their toil**; for the blessing of a household is in its greater numbers.[16]

10. Even if both are bedridden together, each one can still sustain the other on his sickbed by prayer or extra encouragement until he puts him back on his feet, *and the weak one will say "I am strong"* (Joel 4:10). But **alas**, etc.

11. **they will be warm**: male and female warm and delight in each other without having to purchase many coverings with which to wrap and warm themselves in bed. But **if one is alone, how will he be warm** in bed at night, wrapped in a *covering for his naked body alone* (Ex. 22:25)? He would need to purchase pillows and bedding with which to warm himself. As such, he will not have *more benefit for his toil* (v. 9 above).

12. **a three-ply cord**: when they produce a child, they will more easily withstand those who rise against them. And so the Psalmist said: *the sons of youth are like arrows in a brave warrior's hand*, etc., *withstanding the enemy at the gate* (Ps. 127:4).[17]

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13 Better a poor and wise youth, than an old and foolish king who no longer knows to heed warnings.

14 For he went forth from prison to rule; and [the king too] is born to his kingship impoverished.

Commentary (Words)

13. **poor** [*misken*]: the Aramaic translation of poor is *misken*.[18]

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14. Ibn Ezra.
15. Ibn Melekh.
16. The last phrase has its source in rabbinic literature; see, e.g., T. Ket. 12:3.
17. Ibn Ezra.
18. Ibid. The word *misken* is unique to Ecclesiastes; the note pointed out its Aramaic cognate in the translation of Deut. 24:12 and of our verse.

14. **prison** [*ha-surim*]: the root of the word is *alef–samekh–resh*, with the weak *alef* [elided in speech] and missing even in its written form. This refers to a prison where they place those who are confined [*ha-ʾasurim*].[19]

Commentary (Meaning)

13. **Better**: [the author] turns his attention to the monarchy and government, to the respect of servants and the people for the king, and his success on the throne. He said: better is someone tender in years, poor and wise, **than an old and foolish king** who will not listen to those who would caution him. This is because one who aged with foolishness became so stiff-necked and hard-hearted that he does not trust in his loyal servants.

14. Even if this pauper **went forth from prison**, it does not matter; for even the elderly king was impoverished on the day of this birth.

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15 I observed all the living who follow, under the sun, another youth who will rise in his stead.

Commentary (Meaning)

15. It would appear that the Israelites complained and remonstrated against Solomon and acclaimed Jeroboam, the latter being great in the eyes of the nation as is suggested by Scripture °(1 Kgs. ch. 11). The king knew of their private grumblings, and he responded [here] by saying: **I observed all the living** following **another youth** who will rise in the king's stead, and *their eyes failed while waiting* (Ps. 69:4) for the moment that he would ascend the throne. He is referred to as **another youth** either in its plain sense of coming in the king's stead, or alluding to Jeroboam as we said. Since Rehoboam was the king's son and more fitting for kingship than Jeroboam, Rehoboam was [implicitly] taken as the first [youth].

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16 There is no end, for the people, to all those who preceded them, and even those who come later will not rejoice in him; for this too is vanity and empty thoughts.

Commentary (Meaning)

16. **There is no end**: That is to say: although I know that it has always been the people's way to reject what they currently have, wanting *new things every day*

19. Ibn Melekh.

(Lam. 3:23) out of a hankering for what is new and different, time will pass and it will seem as if **there is no end** and limit to things they have before them for *they came to loath it* (Num. 21:5). However, I know that **even those who come later** after their time **will not rejoice in** the new king and will choose new ones, **for this too is vanity and empty thoughts**. The people's respect and praise does not constitute proper felicity, but only vanity, etc.

[End of Section V]

[Section VIII]

Chapter 7:15–8:9

7:15 I have observed everything in my vain life: there is a righteous man who perishes in his righteousness, and an evil man who prolongs [his days] with his evil.

Commentary (Meaning)

15. **everything**: In the brief time that I have lived upon the earth, I have observed things that are contrary to each other: a king *righteous in all his ways* (Ps. 145:17) who does not wrong a single individual nor harm the nations surrounding his kingdom, and he **perishes in his righteousness** and does not succeed in his reign. [On the other hand, I have seen] an evil [king] who *acted wickedly wherever he turned* (1 Sam. 14:47), and he **prolongs** the days of his reign with his evildoing.

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16 Do not be overly righteous and do not be excessively wise—why be confounded?

17 Do not be overly wicked and do not be a fool—why die before your time?

18 It is good that you grasp the one and do not also remove your hand from the other, for one who fears God will do his duty by both.

Commentary (Words)

16. **confounded** [*tishshomem*]: this is in the *hitpaʿel* verbal form, and the letter *shin* has a *dagesh* because of the absence of the *tav* of the *hitpaʿel*. [That is,] in the [standard] *hitpaʿel* form the letter *tav* does not appear before the letters *zayin*, *samekh*, *shin*, and *ṣadi*, but rather after them, and hence the word would prop-

erly be rendered *tishtomem*; nevertheless, a *dagesh* in the shin may indicate the absence [of the letter *tav*], since it would have appeared here[1] were it not for the difficulty in the pronunciation.[2] It is also possible that this word is in the *nif al* verbal form, belonging to the verb stems with a weak middle radical and a doubled third radical, which is also referred to as the quadrilateral verb stem, as in the word *tikkonen* (Num. 21:27);[3] this is correct.

Commentary (Meaning)

16. **Do not be overly righteous**—more than is proper, for absolute justice will not succeed in political [matters]; **and do not be excessively wise**—do not make yourself appear to be wiser than all those who preceded you,[4] wanting to direct everything according to your understanding and wisdom; why should you **be confounded** when you realize that you endeavored for nothing?

17. However, be careful not to incline toward the other extreme to **be overly wicked**, or to **be a fool** by believing all the lies of your servants without inquiring after them, lest they *forge a secret scheme* against you (Ps. 83:4) to kill you **before your time**.

18. **It is good that you grasp** both [qualities] and follow a middle path between the two, for that is the straight path that a man should choose for himself.[5]

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19 The wisdom will be confirmed to the wise from the ten rulers of the city.

20 That there is no man so righteous on earth that he does only what is good and never errs.

Commentary (Meaning)

19[–20]. **wisdom**: He says: if the wise man would consider everything that takes place under the governance of several **rulers of [this] city**, this wisdom **will be confirmed** and verified, **that there is no man so righteous on earth that he does only what is good and never errs**. [He will also understand] that it is impossible for a ruler to behave absolutely justly, doing nothing but good for those residing

1. That is, immediately after the *shin*.
2. Ibn Melekh.
3. Ibn Ezra.
4. Alluding to 1:16.
5. Alluding to M. Avot 2:1.

under his rule. As such, remain on an intermediate path, *then all will be well with you* (Jer. 22:15).

will be confirmed [*taʿoz*]: from the verbal root *ʿayin–zayin–zayin*, which means strength and might and is applied metaphorically to the soul as in [*the dogs*] *have a mighty appetite* [*ʿazze nefesh*] (Isa. 56:11), or [*the rich man*] *answers harshly* [*yaʿaneh ʿazzot*] (Prov. 18:23). To my mind, the metaphor here applies to something being verified and reinforced in the soul of the wise man °(*bekräftigen*).

According to the commentators,[6] the letter *mem* in *me-ʿasarah* is used to indicate comparison [i.e., **more than ten**], but in my opinion it is a preposition indicating place,[7] which is to say that **the wise** learns **from** [**the ten rulers of the city**] and this matter will be verified for him. The meaning of the verses in German: *Die Lehre wird dem Vernünftigen bekräftigt werden, durch zehn Regierungen, die in der Stadt gewesen. Daß kein Mensch auf Erden so gerecht sei, daß er nur thue was gut ist, und niemals fehle*.

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21 Also, do not take to heart everything that is said; lest you hear your servant vilifying you.

22 For very often too, your heart knows, you vilified others.

23 All this I tested with wisdom; I said: "I would be wise," but it is beyond me.

Commentary (Meaning)

21. And now, after you have chosen an intermediate path to grasp *the one* and *the other* [v. 18], **do not take to heart everything that is said** by others about your governance and the administration of your kingdom, and do not pay attention to what people say, as it is their habit to disparage all that is done without their participation.[8] And if **your servant [is] vilifying you** and disparaging your actions—*stop your ears from listening* (Isa. 33:15).

22. **For very often too . . . you vilified others** and disparaged their actions, though they were at times more righteous than you. As such, do not pay attention to

6. See Rashi, Ralbag.

7. Mendelssohn uses the terms *mem ha-yitaron* and *mem ha-maqom*, the first expressing relative value as in the English "more than," while the second is a preposition.

8. Or: ". . . denigrate all that is done by others." The meaning of the sentence is unclear.

words, complaints, and vain things that are insubstantial. And do not stray from the middle path that you have chosen.

23. **All this I tested**—a little of the known wisdom, namely the ultimate wisdom with regard to the governance of created beings. Though **I said: "I would be wise"** and that I would grasp [this wisdom] fully, **it is beyond me**.

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24 All that happened is remote and is exceedingly deep—who can discover it?

Commentary (Words)

24. **exceedingly deep** [*ʿamoq ʿamoq*]: this refers to something that one cannot reach without difficulty and danger, and is metaphorically applied to grasping difficult matters.

Commentary (Meaning)

24. **All that happened is remote.** Whatever existed at the beginning of creation[9] when man had the ultimate degree of felicity before he sinned is beyond us and so exceedingly deep that it is difficult to grasp it in its normal state with the intellect; for man as he is now is extremely far from that perfection.

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25 I turned, I and my heart, to know and to probe and seek wisdom and reckoning; to know wickedness, stupidity, foolishness, and madness.

Commentary (Words)

25. **and reckoning** [*ve-ḥeshbon*]: this is the knowledge of the relation and connection between things.

Commentary (Meaning)

25. **I turned, I and my heart, to know and to probe and seek wisdom**, this being divine governance; **and reckoning** is the relation and connection of natural evils to their causes and grounds.

to know wickedness, stupidity, foolishness, and madness [means that] he wanted to know how wickedness emerges from stupidity, and madness from

9. These opening words are commensurate with Rashi; the remainder of the comment was Mendelssohn's own.

foolishness. Since evil does not descend from heaven,[10] iniquity must come from privation;[11] as such, it is foolishness that causes man to sin, and the absence of knowledge that causes him to act madly and wickedly. Foolishness is not in itself a sin but rather a source of sins and their consequences; thus, he sought to know how stupidity turns into wickedness, and foolishness into madness.

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26 I find woman more bitter than death; her heart—traps and snares, her hands—fetters. One who is good before God will escape her, but the sinner will be captured by her.

Commentary (Words)

26. **traps** [*meṣodim*]: a net with which to trap; its verbal root is *ṣadi–vav–dalet* [to trap].

snares [*va-ḥaramim*]: meaning netting.

fetters [*asurim*]: like shackles and chains to bind the thing trapped by it °(*Bande*).[12]

Commentary (Meaning)

26. **I find woman more bitter than death**. [Woman] is a metaphor for physical desire and sensual longing, which brought about all of these [entrapments]: from it will come wickedness and madness, for [desire and longing] will *blind the eyes* of people *and pervert* their thoughts (Deut. 16:19); they are **traps and snares** *to entrap souls and to bring them down* in nets, *never to emerge* (Ez. 13:18, Ps. 140:11); **her hands** are like *iron fetters, binding* that which was seduced by her (Ps. 149:8). **The sinner will be captured by her**—since she is referred to as **traps and snares**, [the verse] continued to speak [in the idiom] of a net. This is a convincing response to the question mentioned above, for when desire is connected with **stupidity**, the result is **wickedness** and **madness**; if a person does not know how to distinguish the true from the imagined good, and longing—as is its wont—will neither repose nor rest, it is certain to bring man to sin, as if **stupidity** cohabited with sensual longing and produced **wickedness** and **madness**.

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10. See Gen. R. 51 (3).

11. I.e., the absence of something, whether it be wisdom, knowledge, justice, or goodness. See *Guide* III:10.

12. All three entries for this verse are taken from Ibn Melekh.

27 Observe, this is what I found, said *qohelet*; one [next] to one, to find reckoning.

Commentary (Words)

27. **said *qohelet*** [*amerah qohelet*]: [in this instance], *qohelet* means a compilation of wisdom and is a feminine noun. When the author uses it in the masculine, he is referring to the compiler, namely Solomon.[13]

Commentary (Meaning)

27. **one to one, to find reckoning**: That is, if you align [these qualities] **one to one** and use your intellect to seek the relation of one to the other, you will find a reckoning and a close connection between desire and **stupidity**, and **wickedness** and **madness**, as we have mentioned.

28 As for what I sought further but have not found; one man in a thousand I have found, but a woman among all of these I have not found.

Commentary (Meaning)

28. There is no doubt that when King Solomon understood that *his wives had turned his heart away from his God* (1 Kgs. 11:4)[14] his spirit was broken and he regretted his deeds. He said these words with bitterness, scorning the women[15] and *accounting the sin* that he committed in transgressing his God's command *to them* (Num. 12:11). He referred [above] to sensual longing as **woman**, and said that she was **more bitter than death** [v. 26]; he now goes on to add that **one man** out of a thousand could be found, but not **a woman among all of these**. For the number of his wives were a thousand—*seven hundred royal wives and three hundred concubines* (1 Kgs. 11:3)—and among them he did not find a single acceptable woman. An intelligent individual, however, will correctly believe that the king exceeded the bounds of propriety. Had he only taken one wife or a few wives as God had commanded, perhaps he would have found among them *a helpmate, to be about him* (Gen. 2:18), as many who did not reach the level of this wise man have found, since there are among women good and bad individuals

13. Rashi; and see the commentary on 1:1 above.

14. In the original, the biblical phrase reads ". . . his wives turned away his heart after other gods . . ."

15. There is a suggestive allusion here to Esth. 1:17.

just as among men. When Solomon forsook the confines of proper balance in favor of excesses and took a thousand wives, it is not surprising that he found among them neither help and love, nor attachment and intimacy, as when two individuals marry. God commanded kings, [saying] "he should not have many wives" (Deut. 17:17), and even though [the prohibition of] this excess was not directed at commoners, both virtue and nature would support the sound advice that a man should not have more than one wife.

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29 But observe, this is what I found, that God made men upright; but they sought many contrivances.

Commentary (Words)

29. **contrivances** [*ḥishshevonot*]: this is [formed] from the *piʿel* stem,[16] indicating an intensification of its meaning. The word connotes thoughts, artifices, and schemes that are not beneficial °(*Künsteleien*). The word *ḥeshbon* is masculine even though its plural form is *ḥishshevonot*, like the words *ʿavon*, *maqom*, *av*, and the like.[17]

Commentary (Meaning)

29. I found another source of evil in the world, aside from the ones that I have mentioned: **God made men upright** on earth, for all the powers and thoughts rooted in man's heart, which are [inclined] toward good and upright purposes, were given to him by the Master of all good. This was [the state of] man before his sin—upright in all the powers of his soul, *walking straightforwardly* (Isa. 57:2). However, **they**—that is, Adam and Eve and subsequently their children—**sought** many thoughts and schemes, twisting the upright and bending the straight,[18] but this was never the purpose of creation. All the *toil and skillful activity* (Ecc. 4:4) and all the endeavors and artifices that we see in our age, which we imagine are necessary for the very existence of the human species—none of this arose until after men abandoned the straight path in which they were formed and sought *roundabout paths* (Judg. 5:6);[19] from these **contrivances** emerged *one's envy of another* (Ecc. 4:4) and a yearning for money and power, which are the cause of evils and the source for many sins in the world. If man

16. Such words are characterized by a *dagesh forte* marking the second radical.

17. This comment incorporated elements of Ibn Melekh and Ibn Ezra.

18. Alluding to and playing with the words of Ecc. 1:15.

19. Ibn Ezra had alluded to the same verse in Judges and broadly made the same point in a single sentence; Mendelssohn's substantial expansion of the earlier comment was very much his own.

had adhered to the qualities according to which he was created, he would be spared all these afflictions, for he would have neither envy nor competition, neither yearning for money nor love of grandeur,[20] for all of this is the result of the **contrivances** that men **sought**.

20. Or: love of greatness.

Chapter 8

8:1 Who is like the wise man, and who knows the meaning of things? Such a man's wisdom brightens his countenance, its strength intensified in his face.

Commentary (Words)

1. **meaning** [*pesher*]: this means interpretation.[1]

intensified [*yeshunneh*]:[2] it will be doubled [in strength], from the verbal root *shin–nun–heh*.

Commentary (Meaning)

1. **Who is like the wise man**—who became wise with regard to true divine wisdom, that is, divine providence and its lofty and hidden ways; and who is like him, knowing the meaning of all difficult things, explaining every detail—the source of evil in the world, its ultimate end, and how God turned it into something good, *right in its time* (Ecc. 3:11)? Up until this point, [the author] has mentioned only general arguments: he said that evil befell us from foolishness or desire, and that this was not the case at the beginning of creation,[3] and similar things. However, with regard to details he already confessed that it was beyond

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1. Ibn Melekh.

2. In the masoretic text of Ecclesiastes that Mendelssohn reproduced in his book, this word appeared as *yeshunne* with a note affirming that word was written with an *aleph* instead of *heh*. The commentary here, however, spelled the word with a *heh*, as per Mendelssohn's note and his understanding of the word.

3. See the Commentary (Meaning) on 7:29 above, where Mendelssohn wrote that at creation, the world was suffused with goodness; evil entered only with the choices made by mankind.

him.[4] Now he proclaims: "Who would liken himself to the wise man?" This divine wisdom would certainly remove all anger and grief from his heart, for this wise individual will rejoice *in all that was done under the sun* [below, v. 9], since he knows and grasps the meaning [of things]: why God decreed that he should exist, and how he should strive toward a good and desirable end before God. This wisdom will thus **brighten his countenance**, and the radiance of his face will be double that of other people; he will be neither angry nor enraged, neither dumbfounded nor stupefied.[5] Instead, joy will forever fill his face, as he will take pleasure in all the works of God, *from the smallest to the greatest* (Jer. 6:13).

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2 I [caution you]: obey the king's command, and [as for the] sovereign—[he must obey the] divinely sworn word.

Commentary (Words)

2. **I** [*ani*]: the word "caution you" or "command you" is missing here.[6]

[the] sovereign [*ve-ʿal*]: [This word] is separated from the word *divrat* [which follows it] by the cantillation mark *zaqef qaṭon*,[7] and so its meaning is not the same as "on account of."[8] Rather, *ʿal* is a word that describes a ruler,[9] as in *they return not to the Most High* [*ʿal*] °(Hos. 7:16), *they call him Most High* [*ʿal*] °(Hos. 11:7), *the utterance of a man established on high* [*ʿal*] °(2 Sam. 23:1). See the Commentary (Meaning).

Commentary (Meaning)

2. He is speaking here about the rules governing the king and his nation, and how they might attain political felicity.[10] He said, I caution and command everyone in the nation to obey the **king's command**, for he rules the people to act in accordance with his will. But notwithstanding his being the **sovereign**, he, the ruler who was *elevated to this high position* (2 Sam. 23:1), should

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4. Referring to 7:23 above: *All this I tested with wisdom; I said: "I would be wise," but it is beyond me*.

5. See above, 7:7, 16.

6. Ibn Ezra.

7. The masoretic text, including the text printed in *Megillat Qohelet*, does not in fact have a *zaqef qaṭon*, but a *zaqef gadol*; there does not seem to be any clear explanation for this discrepancy. Mendelssohn's point is sustained regardless.

8. *ʿal devar*; see the Commentary (Words) on 3:18.

9. Akin to the English "His Highness."

10. The phrase "rules governing the king" [*mishpaṭ ha-melekh*] is a reference to 1 Sam. 8:9–17. On political felicity, cf. Mendelssohn's discussion in ch. 14 of *Beʾur Millot ha-Higgayon*.

obey the **divinely sworn word**, either because he stands under an everlasting oath[11] [imposed] by *He who seats kings on thrones* (Job 36:7) to do well with his subjects and his nation, or because he swore at the beginning of his reign that he would not contravene the laws and decrees of the state, as is customary. In any event, there is no one to judge the king other than *the judge of all the earth who examines the thoughts and the mind* (Gen. 18:25, Jer. 11:20). This is a fundamental principle in political matters, namely, that the nation not be allowed to judge whether or not the monarch's deeds are good or bad; for the king judges the nation, and not the other way around. Without this, *the land would not find rest* (rev. Judg. 3:30) because of those who rebel against the king and his laws.

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3 Be not hasty [to] go from him, [and] do not be party to a harmful thing; for he will do whatever he pleases.

4 Inasmuch as a king's word has authority, who can say to him "what are you doing?"

Commentary (Words)

3. **hasty . . . go** [*tibbahel . . . telekh*]: this is the same as "to be hasty to go," meaning "to go hurriedly."

4. **authority** [*shilṭon*]: a noun.[12]

Commentary (Meaning)

3. Do not hurry to turn away and leave him as soon as he does something that is not as you want. And **do not be party** to the scheming of rebels *in whom an abominable thing has taken hold* (Ps. 41:9) against the monarch; for he can do with you as he wills, given that *he governs his nation* (1 Sam. 9:17). He has the power and dominion and there is no [authority] greater than him except God.

4. Everywhere that a *king's command and laws reach* (Esth. 4:3) it has **authority** and serves as a binding decree on members of his nation. And **who can say to him "what are you doing?"** No one has the right to sue the king and to say to him: "why are you doing this?"

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11. *mushbaʿ ve-ʿomed*. This phrase was drawn from the rabbinic expression "already obligated [lit.: sworn] from Sinai" to refer to the more generalized idea that Jews live under a perpetual oath to the commandments received at Sinai. See, e.g., Yom. 73b, Shev. 21b–22b.

12. Ibn Melekh.

5 One who obeys a command will not experience a harmful thing; but a wise man knows that there is a time and judgment.

Commentary (Meaning)

5. The person **who obeys** his God's **command will not experience a harmful thing**—he will act as if he does not know and will not be party to the scheming of the rebels, even if there be iniquity with respect to the ruler. And if the king acts wickedly, he should bear it and *not flout his word* (Josh. 1:18); and *he should rely upon his God* (Isa. 50:10), since it is He who enthrones and removes kings. **A wise man knows** that everything has an allotted **time** and that every deed has its **judgment**. If the monarch *acted improperly with his nation* (Ez. 18:18), he should *be serenely confident in the Lord and wait patiently* (Ps. 37:7) as King David said:[13] *Who can lay hands on the Lord's anointed one with impunity? . . . As the Lord lives, the Lord Himself will strike him down, or his time will come and he will die, or he will go down to battle and perish* °(1 Sam. 26:9–10).

6 For every matter there is a time and judgment; a man's evil is heavy upon him.

7 He does not know what is going to happen; and who is to tell him when it will happen?

Commentary (Meaning)

6 [–7]. *The afflictions of mortals* (2 Sam. 7:14) are many[14] and a monarch will not be saved from them all,[15] for **he does not know what is going to happen** and will be unable to protect himself from what the future may bring; *suddenly, calamity will come upon him without warning* (Prov. 6:15) and no one with whom he took advice will be able **to tell him** how he may be saved.

8 No man rules the wind to contain it, and there is no authority over the day of death and no release in battle; commotion will not enable its master to flee.

13. The context of this citation is apposite: it represented David's negative response to the suggestion that Saul, deemed unworthy as king, be killed at a moment of vulnerability.

14. The scriptural citation is again apposite. God speaks there of His relationship with future monarchs: when one of them does wrong, he is chastised.

15. Alluding to Ps. 33:16.

Commentary (Words)

8. **contain it** [*likhlo*]: to restrain, as in *the rain was held back* (Gen. 8:2).

release [*mishlaḥat*]: a noun meaning escape or rescue, as in *those who set free* [*meshalleḥe*] *the feet of the cattle and asses* (Isa. 32:20).[16]

Commentary (Meaning)

8. **No man**, etc. He points to three ways of dying, as David mentioned in the verse I cited above.[17] He said that **no man rules the wind**, to stop or restrain the wind from harming him;[18] this corresponds to *the Lord will strike him down* (1 Sam. 26:10), for those that die in an epidemic perish as a result of a toxic substance[19] that is borne by the wind from place to place. This organism is tiny and cannot be detected by the senses,[20] and none of the king's armies or officers or servants can prevent the wind from entering his chamber and felling him. **There is no authority over the day of death**—this corresponds to *or his time will come and he will die* [ibid.], for when the king's death is at hand[21] his *regal majesty* (1 Chron. 29:25) will not save him. **And no release in battle**—this corresponds to *or he will go down to battle and perish* (1 Sam. 26:10); that is, in battle there is no refuge or escape for the king to flee, for **commotion will not enable its master to flee**. He points out that in the face of all the dangers and injuries that I have mentioned, commotion will not save its master. In this context, **commotion** [*resha'*] has the same meaning as *He is silent—who will agitate him* [*yarshia'*] (Job 34:29), meaning much tumult and sparring.[22]

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9 I observed all this and reflected on all that is done under the sun, a time when men ruled over [other] men to their detriment.

Commentary (Meaning)

9. **all this**: [I observed] **a time when men ruled over [other] men to their detriment**; evil governance will not last forever, but only for a finite time after which

16. Mendelssohn rejected the interpretation of Ibn Ezra, Ralbag, and Ibn Melekh, who read *mishlaḥat* as some kind of weapon, and Rashi, who interpreted it to mean "substitution."

17. 1 Sam. 26:10, referred to at the end of the Commentary (Meaning) on v. 5.

18. Ralbag also read *ruaḥ* as wind rather than spirit, although the broader interpretation was Mendelssohn's own.

19. *eres*; see the following note.

20. Eighteenth-century science had already recognized the existence of micro-organisms and, separately, a vague notion of external or environmental etiology.

21. Echoing 3:2 above.

22. This last point regarding the word *resha'* is from Ibn Ezra.

it will cease. It contravenes nature as well as reason [to think] that the multitude would subject themselves to an individual and heed his word against their best interest, indeed, to their detriment. Such an aberration will not endure.

[End of Section VIII]

[Section IX]

Chapter 8:10–9:12

10 And likewise, I observed evildoers being buried, brought from a holy place, while those who acted justly will be forgotten in the city. This too is vanity.

Commentary (Meaning)

10. **And likewise**: I expended much effort to explain this verse *as words well spoken* (Prov. 25:11)[1] but I did not find [such an explanation], since none of the comments of the exegetes pleased me. The correct explanation is close to what Ralbag wrote: And likewise, I truthfully **observed evildoers** whose memory was almost completely obliterated, as if they were **buried**, but in this [earthly] existence they prosper and walk with conceited hearts from **a holy place**, namely the royal throne. And people **who acted justly**, namely those who *did what is good and right* (Deut. 12:28), **will be forgotten in the city** and they will not be remembered in the place where they did all those good deeds. And [the author] concludes that **this too is vanity**.[2]

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11 Since judgment for the evil deeds is not imposed quickly, people's hearts are therefore emboldened to do evil.

Commentary (Words)

11. **judgment is not imposed** [*en naʿasah pitgam*]: The feminine [verb *naʿasah* (imposed)] is used with a masculine [noun *pitgam* (judgment)]. The appearance of [the negative particle] *en* [not] indicates that the word *naʿasah* must be the feminine present tense, since if it were in the masculine past tense it would have

1. That is, to explain the verse clearly and articulately; cf. Rashi to Gen. 3:8 and Ex. 6:9.
2. The comment paraphrased Ralbag; the political valence, however, was Mendelssohn's.

said *lo naʿasah*, and because *en* is not used with verbs in the past tense. But the word *naʿasah*, which is here in the feminine form, cannot apply to the word *pitgam*, which is a masculine noun, as evident in the verse *the judgment will be heard* [*ve-nishmaʿ pitgam*] (Esth. 1:20).[3] Perhaps *naʿasah* refers to **the evil** that is mentioned in the verse, which is feminine.[4]

Commentary (Meaning)

11. **Since** people see that proper punishment—which is akin to the **judgment** of a deed and its application—has not been exacted **for evil deeds**, **quickly**, they **therefore** think that there is neither justice nor fairness, and their **hearts are emboldened** within them **to do evil**.

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12 Though the sinner does evil a hundred [times] but is shown forbearance, I also know that good will come to those who fear God, who are fearful in His Presence.

13 Will good not come to the wicked and will he not live a long life, like a shadow, he that is not fearful before God?

Commentary (Words)

12. **sinner** [*ḥoṭe*]: the accent falls on the penultimate syllable on the pattern of *ḥoshekh*, because it is an abstract noun, like the word *ḥaṭaʾt* ["sin" or "fault"].[5]

hundred [times] [*meʾat*]: the word "times" is missing.

Commentary (Meaning)

12. The fact that a sinner does some evil a hundred times and that God **shows forbearance** and does not exact punishment is not something that surprises an intelligent individual, for **I also know** that at the end everyone will get his just reward. And if the fear of God will bring man eternal well-being and everlasting felicity, [then . . .]

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3. The verb *nishmaʿ* is masculine.

4. Ibn Melekh.

5. This comment is highly problematic. To begin with, the accent in the word *ḥoṭe* always falls on the ultimate syllable, and it appears precisely that way in the masoretic text that Mendelssohn printed with this commentary. Even if one were to assume that Mendelssohn was proposing a morphological exception and a masoretic variant, the semantic and syntactical implications to the shift could not be harmonized with the remainder of the phrase. This was, finally, reinforced by his comment on the meaning, which was clearly based on a reading of *ḥoṭe* as it appeared in all biblical texts.

13. . . . why shouldn't the absence of fear [of God] be accompanied by a little imagined good, an illusory felicity that *flies away as a dream* (Job 20:8)? If the *wickedness of the wicked* (Ez. 33:12) did not have some fleeting felicity and some impression of good, then a man would almost be compelled to *do good and withdraw from evil* (Ps. 34:15) in his actions. If a person would eat a *poisonous and bitter herb* (Deut. 29:17) when before him were *royal dainties* (Gen. 49:20), he would not be called a sinner but a fool or a sick man. Likewise with good and evil: if the good was beautiful and sweet, and evil was repugnant and bitter, the evildoer would not be a sinner but a lunatic. This would almost constitute a denial of human free will. Thus, it is necessary that evil sometimes be fleetingly beautiful and sweet; this is in itself an imagined good and a transient felicity that has no permanence. This is the meaning of these [two] verses: **I know** that the true **good will come to those who fear God** because they fear Him. And why should **good not come to the wicked**, and [why shouldn't he] **live a long life, like a** *passing* transient ***shadow*** (Ps. 144:4)—just because **he is not fearful before God**? Truly!

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14 There is a vanity that is done on earth, inasmuch as there are righteous people to whom it happens as if they did wicked deeds, and wicked people to whom it happens as if they acted righteously; I say that this too is vanity.

Commentary (Meaning)

14. **There is a vanity**: It is true that this vanity exists on earth, **inasmuch as there are righteous people to whom** bad things **happen as if they did wicked deeds, and wicked people**, etc. However, **I say that this too is vanity**[6] that *flies away as a dream* (Job 20:8) and is no more. One cannot draw any conclusions from this occasional illusory felicity for [the nature of] true felicity.

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15 I praised merriment, for there is nothing better under the sun than for a man to eat and drink and to be merry; this will accompany him in his toil during the days of their life that God has given him under the sun.

16 As I set my mind to obtain wisdom and to observe the matter that is done in the world;[7] even as, by day and night, one's eyes do not see sleep.

6. Note that in his Commentary on 1:2, Mendelssohn explained *hevel* [vanity] as something insubstantial and lacking permanence.

7. An alternative translation, per Mendelssohn's commentary on 1:13: ". . . to observe the preoccupations of [people] in the world . . ."

Commentary (Words)

15. **accompany him** [*yilvennu*]: meaning attachment and adherence.[8]

Commentary (Meaning)

15 [–16]. **I praised**: this verse is closely linked to the one that follows with **I set my mind**, etc. He says: **As I set my mind to obtain wisdom** regarding which path a man should follow to attain what is good, **and to observe the matter that is done in the world**; that is, inasmuch as I had judged matters by appearances, according to what my eyes observed regarding the accidents of human existence,[9] even as a person toils **by day and night** and *sleep eludes his eyes* (Gen. 31:40) from many thoughts, I would adopt the opinion of men of pleasure and **praised merriment**, for **under the sun there is nothing better than to eat and drink and to be merry**.[10]

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17 I observed all that God has done, for one cannot grasp the doings that were done under the sun, on account of a man's effort to seek but inability to grasp; and even if the wise seeks to know, he will not be able to grasp.

Commentary (Words)

17. **on account of** [*be-shel*]:[11] the letter *shin* serves as a substitute for [the word] *asher*[12] and is joined with the letter *lamed* to form one word [i.e., *shel*]. The Sages commonly used this word in their writings, as when they wrote "they are *of* [(*shel*); i.e., belong to] so and so" or "they are *of* the Second Tithe." The prepositional [prefix] *bet* [in *be-shel*] serves both the *shin* and the *lamed*.[13] The word means "on account of" and "because of" as in *this storm came on account of me* [*be-shelli*] (Jon. 1:12).[14]

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8. Ibn Melekh.

9. That is, the random vagaries of human existence.

10. Some elements of this comment were drawn from Ibn Ezra.

11. This comment sought to explain the word *shel*, a word attested only a handful of times in biblical literature.

12. Meaning "that, which, who."

13. The addition of the prepositional prefix *bet*, "in, with, by," also needed explanation. The comment suggested that the prefix could not be taken to serve the *shin* alone and had to assimilate the *lamed* as well, which is to say that the combination of *be-* and *shel* had to mean something more than the biblical *ba-'asher* ("in that, inasmuch;" see above, 8:4).

14. This note was taken verbatim from Ibn Melekh, with the exception of the prooftext—the only other biblical occurrence of the word *be-shel*—which was cited by Ibn Ezra.

Commentary (Meaning)

17. I said once again: If I wish to understand something of the ways of providence, I must reflect upon **all that God has done**, upon what was and what will be, in this world and the world-to-come. For no one can grasp any aspect of divine wisdom if they only consider the **doings that were done under the sun**. This would be like a dream without an interpretation[15] and a question without an answer. One will not grasp the meaning of [these divine] doings and [a proper] judgment concerning them[16] if he does not *get his knowledge from afar* (Job 36:3) with regard to what will transpire later. In the next chapter, [the author] will explain this principle with straightforward proofs. The reader should not stop where this [chapter] ends, for the subject continues until the fourteenth verse of the next chapter.

15. Recalling the language of Gen. 40:5 and passim.

16. Mendelssohn employed the words *pesher* and *pitgam*, both of which appeared earlier in this chapter (vv. 1 and 11).

Chapter 9

9:1 For all this I took to heart, to discern all of it, that the righteous and the wise and their works are in the hands of God; whether love or hate, man does not know everything [that is] before them.

Commentary (Words)

1. **to discern** [*ve-lavur*]: this should have been vocalized with a *ḥolam* since it is a geminate verb, from the verbal root *bet–resh–resh* [to select, separate];[1] but it appears [instead] in the pattern of a hollow verb.[2]

their works [*va-ʿavadehem*]: some explain this as "their deeds,"[3] since *maʿaseh* [deed] is translated [into Aramaic] as *ʿovada*;[4] and this is correct. For if [*ʿavadehem*] meant servants,[5] then the word should have been vocalized as *ve-ʿavdehem*,[6] as in *malkhehem*, *raglehem*. However, according to this the [word should be] vocalized with a long *qamaṣ* as in its Aramaic cognate *ve-ʿovadehon*.[7]

Commentary (Meaning)

1. He continues to explain how it is impossible for a wise man to grasp any of God's actions and His ways if he reflects only upon that which is done under the sun. He says: I also knew how to **discern all of it**, **that the righteous and the wise**

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1. Ibn Ezra. Cf. above, 3:18.

2. The word *lavur*, in other words, is vocalized on the pattern of verbs with a weak middle radical.

3. E.g., Ibn Ezra, Ralbag, R. Obadiah Sforno.

4. Ibn Melekh.

5. Rendering the verse ". . . that the righteous and the wise and their servants . . . ." See his Commentary (Meaning) below.

6. That is, with the letter *bet* vocalized with a *sheva*.

7. See, e.g., Ez. 1:16. On Mendelssohn's analysis, the vocalization of the word is not commensurate with either reading. See his Commentary (Meaning) below.

and their servants—these are the students *obedient to their bidding* (1 Sam. 22:14) like servants; or [perhaps the word] means "their deeds" °(see the Commentary (Words)—are all **in the hands of God**. If a person reflects only on what befalls him in this world, he will not have a way of knowing whether he is loved or hated before the Divine Presence, may He be blessed, for **everything [is] before them** in one [undifferentiated] manner.

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2 Everything is [the same] as for everyone—the righteous and the wicked, the good and the pure and the impure, the one who sacrifices and the one who does not sacrifice—they are one [and the same] accident;[8] the good [person] and the sinner, he who swears as one who fears oaths.

Commentary (Words)

2. **the good and the sinner** [*ka-ṭov ka-ḥoṭe*]: this [formulation of *ka- . . . ka- . . .*] means that the good person is like the sinner, and the sinner is like the good, similar to *I am as you are; my forces are as your forces* (1 Kgs. 22:4), *darkness is as light* (Ps. 139:12), and similar examples.[9]

Commentary (Meaning)

2. Everything happens to each individual as it happens to all others; there is no difference between a **righteous and a wicked** person, and likewise between the **good** person **and the sinner**, etc.

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3 This is the evil in all that is done under the sun, for everything is one accident; and also, the hearts of men are full of evil, and madness in their hearts in their lifetimes—and after, they [join] the dead.

Commentary (Meaning)

3. **This is the evil**. If the matter remains as it is in this world, without resolution for one who dreamed [this],[10] surely this is an absolute and unmitigated evil, **for everything is one accident** as we see **under the sun** on earth. There is no distinction between the one who does good and the sinner; *the righteousness of the righteous and the wickedness of the wicked will fly away like a dream* (Ez. 18:20,

8. *miqreh*; see above, 3:19.
9. Ibn Ezra.
10. Alluding to Gen. 40:5, ". . . each dream with its own interpretation."

Job 20:8), without benefit for the good person nor harm for the sinner: *shall not the Judge of all the earth deal justly* (Gen. 18:25)? *Wrongdoing be far from God and wickedness from Shaddai* (Job 34:10), and there is no greater wrongdoing, wickedness, and injustice than the righteous and the wicked being the same through all existence without distinction and without favor. According to this argument, God would—heaven forbid—pervert justice against the righteous individual.

He added a second argument: unless we believe in the immortality of the soul and a just reward, the sinner who succeeds [in this world] would be an injustice on the part of God. For this too is a great evil and an injustice, that **the hearts of men are full of evil, and madness in their hearts in their lifetimes—and after, they [join] the dead**, they *return to Sheol* (Ps. 9:18) and perish forever. They will neither be reproved nor *refined as silver is refined* (Ps. 66:10) so that they will know and understand that they did not act properly, for they *went after vanity* (Jer. 2:5) and did not distinguish between the imagined good and the everlasting and constant good. Certainly, no wise agent would create intelligent souls—the majesty and splendor of creation—and would allow them a short time to become full of evil and madness, **after** which they would go to **the dead** and cease [to exist] without revival[11] and without hope. Would *God create a being* to afflict him (Num. 16:30) and to take retribution after which there is no revival? Alternately: how, under the governance of the Merciful God, can one find a living person whose entire existence is thoroughly and completely evil?

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4 For whoever would be chosen [read: conjoined], is assurance for all the living; for a living dog is better than a dead lion.

5 The living know that they will die; but the dead do not know anything, and they have no more recompense, for their memory is forgotten.

Commentary (Meaning)

4. **For whoever would be chosen** [*yevuḥar*]—this is the [masoretic] *ḳetiv*, and the *qere* is *yeḥubar* ["conjoined"].[12] According to the *ḳetiv*, its interpretation would appear to me to be as follows: **whoever**, among people, **would be chosen**—even if he be the *lowest of men, plagued and afflicted* (Dan. 4:14, Isa. 53:4)—would in any case be **assurance for all the living**, a sign and a proof that death without

11. *tequmah*.

12. The masoretic *ḳetiv/qere* preserved a distinction between the way a scriptural word appeared in written form and the way in which it was read, in this case transposing the letters *bet* and *ḥet*.

subsequent life is an unmatched evil and retribution, such that even a **living dog**, with its lowliness and disgrace, **is better than a dead lion**. The word *yesh* [**is**] means "he is." On the basis of the cantillation we are compelled to say that the words **for all the living** relate to the predicate of the statement, and not to the words **whoever would be chosen**, which is the subject of the statement. According to the *qere*, the meaning of the verse is thus: **whoever is conjoined** of body and soul, or is **conjoined** of composite nature, would be **assurance for all the living**. The meaning [of both textual readings] is the same.

5. **The living know that they will die**. Despite all the pain and sorrow that this knowledge entails, it is better than the absolute absence of [the soul's] knowledge. For the annihilation of the soul is the worst evil that can happen to a rational being.[13] But **the dead**, whose souls are completely destroyed, **do not know anything, and they have no more recompense, for their memory is forgotten**.

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6 Their love, their hatred, and their zeal have already perished; they will never again have a portion in all that is done under the sun.

Commentary (Meaning)

6. **Their love**. All their actions and deeds and that which their souls grasped *become as though they have never been* (Obad. 1:16); their love and their hate has perished, [as well as their] hope and fear, their haughtiness and unruliness have all *vanished in smoke* (Ps. 102:4), and **they have no portion**, etc.

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7 Go, eat your bread with merriment, and drink your wine with a glad heart, for God has already favored what you have done.

Commentary (Meaning)

7. If there is nothing after death, then those who revel in pleasure—*who feast on dainties, drinking and celebrating* all their lives (Lam. 4:5, 1 Sam. 30:16), saying: *"Eat and drink for tomorrow we die"* (Isa. 22:13)—are certainly right. It is fitting, in accordance with this defective opinion, to say to such a person: "**Go eat your bread with merriment**," etc., **for God has already favored what you have done**;

13. Mendelssohn made the same point in his discussion of suicide and his critique of arguments offered in defense of self-annihilation; see "Über die Empfindungen," *JubA*, 1: 96–100, and the English translation in *PW*, 59–63; and the discussion in Altmann, *Mendelssohn*, 61–64.

He has already acceded to your wishes, and you are not destined to give an account and reckoning before Him.[14]

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8 Let your garments be white at all times, and let oil not be lacking on your head.

9 Enjoy life with a woman that you love all the days of your vain life that God has given you under the sun—all your vain days; for that is your portion in life and in your toil that you toil under the sun.

Commentary (Meaning)

8 [–9]. Always wear clean and white clothing, and your head should not be without good oil; make merry with the **woman that you love** and *desire her* (Deut. 21:11). All these are bodily pleasures. For those who reject [the belief in the] immortality of the soul, this alone remains man's portion in his world and all the toil that he toiled.

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10 Everything that is in your hands to do, do with all your might; for there is neither deed, nor reckoning, nor knowledge nor wisdom in Sheol, whither you are going.

Commentary (Meaning)

10. **Everything**. Surely, according to this opinion, **there is neither deed, nor reckoning, nor knowledge nor wisdom in Sheol, whither you are going**. Do everything within your power for your physical enjoyment, and if it entails wrongdoing and injustice, thievery and oppression—so what? In the end you will die and descend to Sheol, and everything that you enjoy in this world, in your days of vanity, is your only portion. So, follow *your willful heart—swearing and lying, murdering, stealing, and committing adultery* (Deut. 29:18, Hos. 4:2). Do not refrain from partaking in any pleasure. Now see how far things have come, how you will stumble along from one calamity to another and sink into the depths of defective ideas if you do not believe in the immortality of the soul and reward in the world to come.

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11 I further observed under the sun that the race is not given to the swift, nor the battle to the brave, nor bread to the wise and wealth to

14. Regarding the last phrase, cf. M. Avot 3:1, 4:22.

the understanding, nor favor to the insightful; for time and chance happens to all.

Commentary (Meaning)

11. **I further observed**. [The author] attempts to prevail with compelling arguments against one who rejects [the belief in the] immortality of the soul. He says: I further observed that even those who revel in pleasure do not attain what they desire and yearn for in this world, and that all their toil is for no purpose and their diligence in vain. Since they do not believe in divine providence, they are a *target for the arrows* of happenstance and mishaps (Lam. 3:12); everything happens by pure accident and chance. **The race is not given to the swift**, etc., **for time and chance happens to all**, the wise and the fools, the courageous and the weak [alike], and man can do nothing [about this]. Thus, one who says "do everything that is in your might to do"—speaks empty words.[15]

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12 For man does not know his time, like fish caught in a fatal net and birds caught in a trap; like them, men ensnared at a dreadful time, when it falls upon them suddenly.

Commentary (Words)

12. **a fatal net** [*bi-meṣodah raʿah*]: [the word *meṣodah* is written] with a *ḥolam*;[16] it refers to a net used for trapping.[17]

ensnared [*yuqashim*]: this is an adjective,[18] [conforming to] the pattern of *yet the bush was not consumed* [*ukkal*] (Ex. 3:2), [or] *taken* [*luqqaḥ*] *from you* (2 Kgs. 2:10), with the weak quiescent [*vav*] compensating for [the absence of] the *dagesh*.[19]

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15. The last two sentences were drawn from Ibn Ezra.

16. Rather than *meṣudah* with a *shuruq*.

17. Ibn Melekh.

18. *shem ha-toʾar*; in the medieval grammatical terminology of Ibn Ezra, this term also indicated a verbal adjective, in this case a passive participle.

19. Ibn Melekh, drawing substantially on Ibn Ezra's comment here and to Ex. 3:2. Medieval Hebrew grammarians struggled to explain the relatively rare appearance of the passive participle derived from the simple verb form (*binyan qal*), a category to which the words cited here belong. However, the word *yuqashim* (from the root *yud-quf-shin*) was morphologically distinct from other parallels (such as *ukkal*) in that the *yud* is vocalized with a *shuruq* (thus followed by a *vav*) and the middle radical (the *quf*) is absent a *dagesh*. According to the early medieval theory of Ibn Hayyuj and later adopted by Ibn Ezra (cf. above, Commentary (Words) on 3:18), the quiescent *vav* provided a lengthening of the first vowel in compensation for the absence of the *dagesh* in the *quf*.

Commentary (Meaning)

12. **For**, etc. Accident and mishap will prevent him from doing what he desires, because it will come upon him suddenly,[20] without him knowing. He compared humans to fish and birds since they are unaware until they fall[21] into the net, *and there is none to say "get them out!"* (Isa. 42:22) [and] *no one to pity them and none to console them* (Jer. 15:5), because for this [end] they were formed.[22] This would likewise be the case with humans if there were neither judgment nor accounting before the One who spoke and brought forth the world.[23]

Now, in light of all this, go and consider how much damage and confusion would necessarily ensue if you did not believe that the soul would survive the death of the body and that it will ultimately give an accounting and reckoning before the supreme king.[24] Is it not *bad and bitter to forsake this fountain of life, trusted waters that do not fail* (Jer. 2:13, 19, Isa. 33:16, 58:11)? If after death there is nothing, heaven forbid, then God created His world only to the detriment of intelligent beings, for the oppressed *will perish in his righteousness without hope* (Ecc. 7:15, Job 7:6),[25] while the oppressor fills his heart with evil and madness in his lifetime, *and after, he* [*joins*] *the dead* [above, v. 3], with *none to say "get him out!"* (Isa. 42:22). *The days* of a person's life are few, *sated with trouble, his pride but pain and sorrow* (Job 14:1, Ps. 90:10) *and empty thoughts* (Ecc. 1:14) and from there [he goes] to Sheol, to absolute and ultimate destruction and annihilation. Furthermore, in this world there is no opportunity for the perfection of the soul and [the attainment of] excellence in moral conduct and ethical traits: justice is *deceptive* and faith is *vanity* (Prov. 31:30). Instead, *we all follow our willful hearts like the beasts of the earth* (Deut. 29:18, Job 35:11).

A further evil is[26] that animal pleasures are not within man's control, for he is susceptible and prone to accidents and mishaps; he is ensnared in a trap, **at a dreadful time**, like fish and birds **not know**ing their **time**. It would be appropriate that he be *wearied with his life and prefer strangulation* (Gen. 27:46, Job 7:15)

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20. *yagiaʿ ʿadav pitʾom*; Ibn Ezra, upon whom this opening line is based, has *yagiaʿ elav hamavet pitʾom*. Mendelssohn may have transcribed the sentence incorrectly, but there is also the possibility of two different biblical allusions: (1) Isa. 47:11 has the phrase *coming upon you suddenly* [*ve-tavo ʿalayikh pitʾom*], which may suggest a typographical error here (*ʿadav* coming instead of *ʿalav*). (2) Prov. 6:15, *calamity will come upon him suddenly* [*pitʾom yavo edo*]. Zeev Harvey has suggested that Mendelssohn might have read "For man does not know his time" as a reference not to death but to a time of calamity, thus leading him to simply revise the phrase taken from Ibn Ezra.

21. Until this point, the comment is drawn from Ibn Ezra.

22. The last phrase is rabbinic, appearing in M. Avot 2:8 and elsewhere.

23. This sentence combined rabbinic phrases from M. Avot (3:1, 4:22) and the daily prayers.

24. M. Avot 3:1, 4:22.

25. Mendelssohn alludes back to the beginning of this section to summarize and distill the overall message.

26. An emendation of the *raʿ* to *daʿ* yields another possible reading: "Know, from this, that . . ."

upon comprehending all this, were it not that death is the destruction of the soul, an absolute annihilation, according to those who reject [the belief in the immortality of the soul]. If so, there is no greater retribution than this—*he will turn right and find no peace, and he will turn left and meet terror* (Gen. 24:49, Jer. 14:19). A man's life is left to accident and mishap, and his death—a *destruction decreed* (Isa. 10:22). As such, he will remain confounded *like a man who is stunned* and confused (Jer. 14:9), not knowing where to turn, what to chose and what to abandon, what to love and what to hate. Where, then, is the glory of God on account of which He created all the created beings? Where is *His great kindness and mercy upon all His works* (Ps. 145:8–9) if He created the choicest of all creatures only to their own detriment? Rather, it is as the wise counselor[27] said: The Creator left a fountain of eternal life[28] for us in the form of a blessing for our souls; with it, we can console ourselves for the vain deeds and the sorrow of non-existence; there, *God will judge the righteous and the wicked* and every man will *eat the fruit of his works* (Ecc. 3:17, Isa. 3:10); *there, a time for every matter and every deed*, and *all that is done under the sun* [above, v. 6] will be done only in accordance with the will and providence of the Creator, which leads and directs man from the day of his birth unto eternity, for the soul does not die but rather remains [in existence] *for ages to come* (Isa. 45:17). And if, in this world, the righteous are subject to the [punishments warranted by] the actions of the wicked, and the wicked individual [gleans the reward] of the righteous—*do not wonder at the fact* (Ecc. 5:7);[29] for the meaning of the actions and judgment is for the world to come, as the Sages were wont to explain in a number of Talmudic passages.

This will dispel the doubts that trouble the intelligent soul, and *it will find rest* (Jer. 6:16) against all the bad and defective thoughts that we mentioned. *Injustice* will thus be distanced from the bosom of *a faithful God; the Lord is upright and his deeds true* (Deut. 32:4)[30] *and the earth is full of His kindness* (Ps. 33:5). While one who rejects [the belief in the immortality of the soul] *walks in darkness and has no light*, the believer *will see,* [*in*] *brilliant light* (Isa. 50:10, 9:1), the ways of men and that which befalls them. With this, surely *he will rejoice in the Lord, and his being*[31] *will exult in his God* (Ps. 104:34, Isa. 61:10); *he will say "there is a reward for innocence; verily, there is a God who judges on earth!"* (Ps. 58:12). Blessed is the faithful God who planted eternal life within us,[32] and bestowed upon us knowledge and understanding to look upon His upright and perfect deeds and to understand from that which He has done that it was for our benefit that He

27. I.e., Solomon.

28. See Prov. 13:14, 14:27, and Ralbag loc. cit.

29. The verse cited is most apposite: "If you see in a state oppression of the poor and suppression of right and justice, do not wonder at the fact. . . ."

30. Mendelssohn rephrased the verse.

31. Or: his soul.

32. Echoing the traditional blessing recited after the reading of the Torah.

formed us *ex nihilo*. Not from anger but *with mercy and great kindness* (Isa. 63:7) he created, formed, and made everything that was created. This is particularly so with regard to the choicest of all creatures, namely man [endowed] with an intelligent soul; and even more so those who are the choicest of the human species, whom He chose from among all the nations and languages.[33] *Blessed is the Lord, from eternity to eternity* (Ps. 106:48).

I went on at some length in this discourse in order to make clear to you my opinion of the content of the wise author's intention. He certainly did not set out to arouse doubt in the heart of the believer, heaven forbid, but rather to set the truth on its foundations, and to strengthen belief in the soul of the intelligent individual. For [belief in the immortality of the soul] is a pillar and principle of our holy Torah, as is known to anyone who *is called by the name Israel* (Isa. 44:5).

[End of Section IX]

33. Echoing the language of the evening *qiddush* for the festivals.

[Section XII]

Chapter 11:7–12:7

7 Sweet is the light, and a delight for the eyes to behold the sun.

Commentary (Words)

7. **Sweet is the light** [*matoq ha-ʾor*]: this is speaking metaphorically[1] because in its primary meaning sweetness applies only to taste.

Commentary (Meaning)

7. After he advised men to be industrious in commercial dealings and agriculture, he begins to rouse one's thoughts [to the subject of] of rest and joyfulness. He said that **sweet is the light** to those that see it **and a delight for the eyes to behold the sun** when resting from labor, that is, after you have finished your work.

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8 If a man should live many years, he should enjoy them all; and remember the days of darkness, for they will be many—all that comes is vanity.

Commentary (Meaning)

8. **If a man should live many years**, it is fitting that he **enjoy them all**. However, even in his joyfulness he should remember days of *anguish and distress* (Isa. 8:22) **for they will be many**. And then, whatever **comes** his way and happens to him **is vanity**, because in days of adversity one does not remember the days of prosperity that have passed.

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9 Rejoice, young man, in your youth, and your heart will delight you while you are young; follow the ways of your heart and what your eyes

1. Ibn Melekh.

take in, see; and know that on account of all these God will bring you to judgment.

10 Remove vexation from your mind and that which is disagreeable from your flesh; for youth and the dawn of life are vanity.

Commentary (Words)

9 [–10]. **in your youth** [*be-yaldutekha*]: a noun for the early years of life, similar to **for youth and the dawn of life** [*ha-shaḥarut*] **are vanity** (v. 10) [where *shaḥarut*] is derived from *for dawn* [*shaḥar*] *is rising* (Gen. 32:27). The days of youth are referred to in this way because they are akin to dawn when it breaks out, as in *then your light will burst through like the dawn* (Isa. 58:8). This is like aging being compared to evening, as the author said *Sow your seed in the morning and do not rest your hand in the evening* (Ecc. 11:6)—which is a metaphor for man's efforts in his youth and his old age.[2] It may also be that *ha-shaḥarut* is an allusion to black hair,[3] [i.e.,] before the onset of old age.

Commentary (Meaning)

9. **Rejoice, young man**: Know that sorrow and wretchedness are not [appropriate to] serving God. On the contrary, we are divinely instructed to accept the good that comes from Him with joy and appreciation, as the rabbi said to the Khazar king °(part II, section 50 [of *Kuzari*]):[4] "The Holy Torah did not command asceticism for us, but rather a balanced approach, providing each of the mental and physical faculties its due portion, without [undue] emphasis or preference. For it is impossible to favor an aspect of one faculty without diminishing the second one: a person who abandons an equilibrium [and inclines toward] the faculty for desire curtails the faculty for thought and comprehension, and vice versa; and one who would be inclined toward power and dominance will curtail another faculty. [Similarly,] much fasting is not [commensurate with] divine service for a person whose appetites and faculties are weak and whose body is thin; rather, such a person is obligated to treat his body gently. Reducing one's assets is also not [commensurate with] divine service, if such assets were acquired lawfully and without excessive effort, and if it did not unduly distract him from the pursuit of wisdom and performing good deeds. This is especially the case for one who has children to care for, and his intention is to spend [the

2. Ibn Melekh, with modifications.

3. Ibn Ezra; *shaḥor* means black.

4. What follows is not an exact citation from the *Kuzari*. While Mendelssohn adhered fully to the intent of the passage and took the central words and phrases from the Tibbonite Hebrew version, he edited and revised the text with interpolated clarifications, changes of tenses, and some word substitutions in order to provide the reader with a clearer and more accessible text.

assets] to fulfill religious obligations[5]—in this case, increasing [one's assets] is the more appropriate course. The general principle is that our Torah balances[6] fear, love, and joy; through each of them you can draw close to God. Submission and abstention on fast days is no dearer to God than your joy on the Sabbath and festivals, as long as your joy is properly intended and sincere." See that [passage of the *Kuzari*], which goes on at some length with this discourse. The essential point is that his intentions be directed toward God, and that we should always remember that He who *probes the mind and the heart* (Jer. 11:20) will consider that which is hidden in our hearts and will judge us for all the deliberations, thoughts, and inclinations of our souls, be they for joy or sorrow, for anger or for the heart's delight.

This is the meaning of the verse with which we are engaged. **Rejoice, young man, in your youth**, for they are the days of merriment, **and your heart will delight you while you are young**. You will even be able to **follow the ways of your heart and what your eyes take in** without sinning, if you surely remember and don't forget **that on account of all these God will bring you to judgment**, and that you are destined to give an account and reckoning before Him[7] regarding what you devoted to each and every one of your mental and physical faculties. The ways of the heart and what the eyes take in were embedded in man at the beginning of creation in order to be used toward objectives that are good and desirable to the Creator, may His name be blessed. If a person remembers the day of reckoning that I mentioned above, there is no doubt that they[8] will direct him toward the desired and hoped-for good in the world to come. He should regulate and apportion each of them according to what is fitting for him, without excess or want. With regard to the scriptural [admonition] *not to wander after your heart and eyes* (Num. 15:39), there is no doubt that it is referring to a deviation from the middle path, for this is the meaning of "to wander after." The [concluding words of that verse], *that lead you astray*, also indicate this meaning, for [his heart and his eyes] will not cause a man to sin unless he lusts after them and forgets all the divine commandments, which is not the case if he remembers **that on account of all these God will bring him**[9] **to judgment.**

10. **youth and the dawn of life are vanity**; they will not last forever, but will quickly move along and fade.

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5. The translation follows Zamosc's *Oṣar Neḥmad*, which explained this passage by pointing out that parents were *religiously* obligated to support young children.

6. *neḥeleḳet*. The translation follows the reading of *Oṣar Neḥmad* (see previous note).

7. M. Avot 3:1, 4:22.

8. I.e., his heart and eyes.

9. Mendelssohn shifts this part of the verse from second to third person to mesh better with his own discussion.

Chapter 12

12:1 Remember your creator in the days of your youth; before unpleasant days come and years arrive when you will say, "I have no pleasure in them."

2 Before the sun and light and moon and stars grow dark, and the clouds pass after the rain.

Commentary (Words)

1. **in the days of your youth** [*beḥurotekha*]: a noun, similar to *neʿurekha* [youth].[1]

Commentary (Meaning)

1. **unpleasant days**: these are the days of old age and sickness.[2]

2. **Before . . . grow dark**: With old age, the ocular fluid becomes murky[3] and it appears as if clouds are constantly passing before his eyes. They will block the light of the sun, which is to say that they will muddle the eyesight until the fluid clears, and then **the clouds pass after the rain**, for as soon as the murky liquid clears from the eye, sight returns.[4]

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1. Ibn Melekh.

2. Ibn Ezra. Ecc. 12:1–7 was subject to an extended metaphorical reading in Shab. 151b–152b with parallels in Lev. R. § 18.1, and Ecc. R. ch. 12, and this served as an exegetical template for many post-rabbinic interpretations of these verses. Mendelssohn's commentary was informed by both the rabbinic texts and their medieval formulations.

3. *yitʿakru laḥut ha-ʿayin*.

4. The rabbinic reading, followed by Rashi and others, understood the verse as a reference to weakened eyesight caused by a lifetime of tears. Ralbag, however, explained it as ocular degeneration due to aging, and Mendelssohn elaborated this further.

3 When those who guard the house quiver, and the men of valor are bowed; the [maids] lessened their grinding and were idle, and those who peer through the windows grow dim.

Commentary (Words)

3. **quiver** [*she-yazuʿu*]: similar to *he did not rise nor even quiver* [*zaʿ*] (Esth. 5:9).[5] Here it means that they *will be seized with* shuddering and *trembling* (Isa. 33:14).

idle [*u-vaṭlu*]: it means that they ceased their work.[6]

lessened [*miʿeṭu*]: this is a transitive verb as per its common usage, meaning that they lessened the grinding.[7] Or perhaps the meaning is that they already ground and diminished the [quantity of] food over the course of many years, as a result of which they became weaker.

Commentary (Meaning)

3. **those who guard the house**: This is a metaphor for hands and forearms, which guard the body against harm.[8]

and the men of valor are bowed: a metaphor for thighs, upon which the entire body rests; they will become bent from weakness.[9]

who peer through the windows: these are the eyes.[10]

4 The doors to the street are shut, while the sound of the mill grows ever faint; one rises to the voice of a bird, and the daughters of sound are lowered.

Commentary (Words)

4. **grows ever faint** [*bi-shefal*]: this is a noun[11] [in the construct form], and in its absolute form is *shafal* or *shefel*.

5. Ibn Ezra.
6. Ibn Melekh.
7. Ibn Melekh, following Ibn Ezra.
8. Ibn Ezra.
9. Rashi.
10. Ibid.
11. Ibn Ezra.

Commentary (Meaning)

4. **The doors to the street**: These are the bodily orifices[12] that open to the outside.

while the sound of the mill grows ever faint: a metaphor for the digestion and mincing of food in the stomach and digestive tract;[13] for the sound of the millstone will grow more faint at the end of the grinding when there are fewer seeds between the base and the upper millstone.

one rises to the voice of a bird: when he has grown old, even the voice of a bird rouses him from sleep.[14]

the daughters of sound are lowered: this means that the bronchi of the lungs, from which the voice emerges, will grow weak, and from the frailty of his old age he will be unable to sing and to raise his voice.

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5 They also fear elevation and terrors on the road; the almond blossoms, the grasshopper is burdened, and desire droops. But man sets out for his eternal abode, with mourners all around in the street.

Commentary (Words)

5. **terrors** [*ve-ḥatḥattim*]: the first and third radicals are doubled because the middle radical is swallowed; the word is from [the same verbal root as] *you perceive a terror* [*ḥatat*] (Job 6:21)[15] °(*Schrecknisse*).

blossoms [*ve-yaneʾṣ*]: this has the same meaning as *pomegranates in bloom* [*heneṣu*] (Song 7:13)[16] from the verbal root *nun–vav–ṣadi*, with the *aleph* replacing the *yud*[17] °(*blühen*).

desire [*ha-ʾaviyyonah*]: this is an adjective,[18] from the verbal root *aleph–bet–heh* with the *yud* replacing the *heh* in the third radical. It means desiring and yearning[19] °(*die Begierde*).

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12. Rashi.
13. Ibid.
14. Ibid.
15. Ibn Ezra.
16. Rashi.
17. Ibn Melekh.
18. See Commentary (Words) on 9:12.
19. Ibn Melekh.

Commentary (Meaning)

5. **They also fear elevation**: he is afraid of hillocks and knolls on the pathways lest he stumble on them—he constantly finds many fears and terrors on the road.[20]

the almond blossoms: this is an allusion to old age that quickly overcomes a person, like this almond that hurries to bloom before all the other trees.[21]

the grasshopper is burdened: Commentators interpreted this as a metaphor for the male reproductive organ,[22] that he will bear them like *one carrying a burden breaking down under his load* (1 Kgs. 5:29, Ex. 23:5); and **desire droops** also refers to this meaning, that the yearning soul will annul its accord with the body.[23] There are those who say that the word *aviyonah* is also a metaphor for the sexual organ,[24] and if so *ve-tafer* would indicate the second person masculine, like *you subvert* [*tafer*] *piety* °(Job 15:4). He concludes with **but man sets out**, etc., that is, everything mentioned results from the fear of death that descends upon the body. For the **mourners** were already milling around, since they came in advance to inform the body of its demise; and even if he did not perceive this, the signs were evident.[25]

If we knew [that the words] *ḥagav* and *aviyyonah* were names of recognized fruit-bearing trees, I would have explained the verse in [the context of] its subject: that the almond tree would blossom, the *ḥagav* would be burdened down with fruit, and the *aviyyonah* would also produce its fruit. If so, *ve-tafer* would mean "to bear."[26] [And] even though [this word] would derive from a different verb stem—for [the assumed stem] *peh–resh–yud* is a verb with a weak third radical, and the word here should have been *ve-tifreh* or *u-tefareh*[27]—we might not have been concerned about this [anomaly] in order to explain the verse according to its *peshaṭ*. It may be that all these occur in the same season—that the almond tree blossoms and the *ḥagav* becomes burdened and the *aviyyonah* produces fruit—and they serve as a simile for the rapid onset of aging. We find that our Sages referred to one variety of the caper as *aviyonot* °(Berakhot 36[a]), so this makes it likely that *aviyyonah* was also the name of a tree, similar to the

20. Rashi.

21. Ibid.

22. These interpretations were based on Shab. 152a; see Rashi and Ibn Ezra.

23. Ibn Melekh.

24. Ibid.

25. The last phrase was in Aramaic, from Meg. 3a and San. 94a, and more literally rendered "even though he did not perceive this, his *mazzal* perceived it." Mendelssohn clearly did not take *mazzal* to mean an astrological sign or a guardian angel; it was, rather, a natural manifestation of the individual's demise.

26. From the verb stem *peh–resh–yud*, assumed to be a primitive form of *peh–resh–heh*.

27. By contrast, the verb form that does appear here, *ve-tafer*, would suggest a geminate verb stem *peh–resh–resh*, which means "to frustrate, nullify, or rescind."

almond, the apple, and so forth, which are the names of trees.[28] However, I found no evidence for *ḥagav* [being the name of a tree], and so I am not inclined to explain the verse in this manner.

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6 Before the silver cord is distanced [read: knotted] and the golden vessel is shattered; the jug is broken at the spring, and the wheel is shattered at the well.

Commentary (Words)

6. **knotted** [*yerateq*]:[29] its meaning is like *chains* [*retuqot*] *of silver* (Isa. 40:19); the sense [of the phrase here] is that the cord will be knotted and made into something chain-like, thereby becoming shorter.[30]

shattered [*ve-taruṣ*]: from the verbal root *resh–ṣadi–ṣadi*, meaning "is broken."[31] The *mela' fu"m*[32] comes in place of a *ḥolam* on the pattern of *tisov*.

golden vessel [*gullat ha-zahav*]: it would seem from the context here that next to the well stood a large water-basin into which the jug of well water was spilled; this was called a *gullah* as in *upper basins* [*gullot*], etc. (Josh. 15:19),[33] and likewise, *above it, a bowl* [*gullah*] °(Zech. 4[:2]).

shattered [*ve-naroṣ*]: its root is *resh–vav–ṣadi*, meaning "running," on the same pattern as *naḳhon* from the root *ḳaf–vav–nun*. The root may also be *resh–ṣadi–ṣadi*, "breaking," on the pattern of *namog*.[34]

Commentary (Meaning)

6. **Before . . . is knotted** [*yerateq*]—this is the [masoretic] *qere*, and the *ḳetiv* is *yeraḥeq* ["to be removed, distanced"]. The parable speaks of a well and the drawing of water. The **jug** is tied to a **cord**, and the cord is attached to a **wheel** by which water is raised from **the well**. The waters are then spilled into the **vessel**

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28. In other words, trees that derive their names from their fruit.

29. Mendelssohn referred only to the masoretic *qere*, which replaced the *ḥet* with *tav*. Cf. 9:4 above and the note there; and see the Commentary (Meaning) below.

30. Cf. Ibn Ezra and Radaq, *Sefer ha-Shorashim*, s.v. *resh–tav–quf*.

31. Ibn Melekh offered this as one of two possibilities.

32. Or: *melo' fum*, an alternate medieval term for *shuruq*, and in modern terminology, *ḳubuṣ*.

33. The word *gullot* in Josh. 15:19 is usually taken to mean "springs," but Mendelssohn followed Ralbag in taking it to indicate a pool of water, from which he generalized *gullah* to mean something that contained water.

34. The two possibilities with regard to the verbal root were noted in Ibn Melekh and earlier in Radaq's *Sefer ha-Shorashim*, s.v. *resh–vav–ṣadi* and *resh–ṣadi–ṣadi*.

which stood next to the well. Were the rope to become knotted and twisted as if it were a chain, it would not reach into the well. This is according to the *qere*. The *ketiv* [has the word] **distanced**, but the matter is the same: if the rope is far from **the spring**, or if **the jug** or **the wheel** or **the vessel** into which the waters are poured were **shattered**, there would be no more use for the **well**. This is the parable, and it would appear that its parabolic referent[35] is to the circulation of blood through the body by means of the human heart and the veins and arteries.[36] For the arteries carry the blood from the heart's left cavity to all the large and small organs of the [human] body,[37] while the veins gather the blood from those organs and return it to the heart's right cavity. From that cavity, blood is circulated through an artery to the lungs, and from there it returns through a vein to the left cavity.[38] [From this cavity] it returns again and again to the organs and from the organs to the heart, *circulating over and over* (Ecc. 1:6) at least twenty-four to thirty times an hour,[39] as is known to experts in the science of anatomy who have studied the human body extensively and demonstrated God's wonders in forming the select of all creatures. It is known that man cannot live if these vessels cease to work since the movement of the heart is the source of human life, and if the blood ceases to circulate the heart cannot pulsate, and vice versa. As such, using a refined style, the wise author aptly compared the flow of blood and its circulation to the drawing of water by means of a wheel and cord, a jug and a spring. He referred to death and the cessation of the heart, arteries, and the lungs as the knotting of a rope, the shattering of a jug, and a wheel and golden vessel, since with all these the drawing of water is impaired.

Although we cannot specifically connect all the words of the parable with their intended referent, it is a matter of good refined style to add details even though they contain no particular meaning for the lesson imparted. This is well known to masters of poetry and refined style. Even with regard to prophetic parables, Maimonides wrote in the introduction to the *Guide*:[40] "Prophetic parables are of two kinds: those parables in which each word indicates some meaning, and those in which the parable as a whole conveys the general meanings. In

35. Mendelssohn was using the classical terms *mashal* and *nimshal*.

36. The reading of this verse as a parable for the circulation of blood was already suggested by Ralbag, albeit in simpler terms and assuming medieval notions of blood circulation.

37. *evare ha-guf*, which could also mean limbs.

38. Mendelssohn laid out a purposely minimal and simplified version of blood circulation based on the widely known seventeenth-century discoveries of William Harvey. For example, his description spoke vaguely of the left and right cavity (*ḥalal*), although the subdivision of atria and ventricles was by this point well known.

39. This number seems to have reflected eighteenth-century knowledge of circulation; modern medicine assumes about double the number.

40. As with his citation of *Kuzari* in his Commentary (Meaning) on 11:9, Mendelssohn does not provide an exact citation and edited the text with slight editing and minor omissions. The thrust and intent of the passage, however, remained faithful to the original.

such a parable very many words are to be found, not every one of which adds something to the intended meaning. Rather, they serve to embellish the parable and the coherence of its words, or to further conceal the intended meaning; hence the words proceed in such a way as to accord with everything required by the parable's external meaning." See the source cited.

Other exegetes[41] explained that the **silver cord** was a metaphor for the spinal cord and other fibers called *nerven* [nerves] that extend from the brain and the spine to all the limbs, and they are [grayish]-white like the appearance of silver; [in their view,] the **golden vessel** is the membrane that is atop the brain and is golden in appearance.[42] According to this [interpretative] approach it may be that the **spring** is the brain itself, since it is the source and spring of the vital humors that flow via those white sinews, called *nerven*, to all the limbs of the body to produce voluntary movement and sensation. If the mixture [of those humors] is lacking and the source dries up, all movement and sensation would be terminated and the individual would immediately die. And likewise, it is known that if the membrane in the brain would be ruptured or if the spinal cord knotted and shortened, it would be impossible for the individual to exist.

This is, in any event, an exceedingly fine parable. And it is apparent from this that the circulation of blood or the circulation of vital humors from the brain to the sinews that I mentioned was known to King Solomon, either by means of the powers of his great intelligence, or made known to him by divine inspiration. [He had this knowledge] even though it was hidden and inaccessible to all the wise men of the ancient nations and was unknown until around a century ago through the experiments of more recent [scientists].[43]

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7 The dust returns to the earth as it was; and the life-breath returns to God who gave it.

Commentary (Meaning)

7. **The dust returns**: Here the wise king revealed his belief—the belief of the Torah and of wisdom—that man's life-breath was given to him by the Creator of all, and that man's soul is not an accident of the body[44] but, rather, a simple created substance separate from the body, undefined by space. [This soul] exists

41. Rashi and Ibn Ezra explained that the silver cord referred to the spinal cord and that it was white as silver; beyond this simple statement, the detailed elaboration was Mendelssohn's.

42. Ibn Ezra.

43. Solomon's outstanding acumen and wisdom and his superiority over his contemporaries is based on 1 Kgs. 5:9–14. The notion that this knowledge was lost to the Jews and later recovered by gentiles finds its source in *Kuzari* II:66, with a parallel (regarding metaphysical knowledge) in *Guide* I:71.

44. That is, not a mere physical attribute.

when the body dies, and returns to the God who created it when the body returns to dust. From here, you can see that what I explained in chapters 3, 8, and 9 is correct, and that the wise author never intended to raise doubts about principles of faith without refuting them; for this is not wise behavior.

[End of Section XII]

[Section XIII]

Chapter 12:8–12:14

8 Vanity of vanities, said *qohelet*, all is vanity.

Commentary (Meaning)

8. **vanity of vanities**: After the author raised the subject of death, he returned to his opening words and ended where he began. The word *qohelet* here has a definite article [*ha-qohelet*] since it is a descriptive noun; the definite article is never used for a personal name.[1]

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9 Inasmuch as *qohelet* was wise, he further taught the people, and weighed and deliberated, [and] composed many proverbs.

10 *Qohelet* endeavored to find appealing expressions, writing honest things, words of truth.

Commentary (Words)

9. **weighed** [*ve-ʾizzen*]: This is either related to the word *moʾzenayim* [a scale], that is, he weighed matters against each other °(*abgewogen*); or it may be related to the word *ozen* [ear],[2] in that he inclined his ear to listen °(*gehorcht*), or that he caused others to listen, as in *then he opens men's understanding* [*ozen anashim*] (Job 33:16), and *no one tells me* [*et azeni*] (1 Sam. 22:8).

deliberated [*ve-ḥiqqer*]: *hat nachgedacht* [reflected upon].

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1. See the Commentary (Words) on 1:1.
2. To this point the comment is drawn from Ibn Melekh.

Commentary (Meaning)

9. **Inasmuch as *qohelet* was wise**: In proportion to the abundant wisdom that he possessed, so **he taught the people**: [what he] heard from others, he weighed with intelligence [and] **deliberated** with his reason. And **composed many proverbs**: for *he composed three thousand proverbs* (1 Kgs. 5:12), each one having an inner meaning that pertained to wisdom and ethics or [some] area of inquiry.

10. **endeavored**: This means that after all the inquiry, the wise author also endeavored to turn his teachings into *pleasant words* (Prov. 16:24) and **appealing expressions**; and that they be **words of truth** written with honesty and the sweetness of refined style in order that they penetrate the nation's soul and make an impression.

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11 The words of the wise are like goads, like nails implanted by masters of collections; they were given by one shepherd.

Commentary (Words)

11. **goads** [*ḳa-darevonot*]: *darvan* is a spike attached to the top of a wooden prod to control the oxen at the time of plowing; the wooden prod is called a *malmad*, and the spike is a *darvan* (*ein Stichel*).[3]

Commentary (Meaning)

11. For **the words of the wise are** themselves **like goads** thrust into the heart of the intelligent listener; **masters of collections** are those who gather words of wisdom from books and from scholars and compose texts from them.[4] The author wrote that the words of these **masters of collections** are like nails °(*wie Nägel*) planted and fixed in a man's soul, such that they cannot but leave some impression, as the rabbi said to the Khazar king °(part V, fifth introduction):[5] "The souls of those who hear [the words of] the admonisher are impacted by the

3. Ibn Melekh.

4. The comment was drawn from Ibn Ezra, who had explained that "masters of collections are those who gather from many books and compose texts," but Mendelssohn inserted the words ". . . and from scholars [*mi-pi soferim*]," thereby including oral transmission alongside written texts. This insertion appeared to be a nod to a formulation from *Kuzari* II:72, "from the mouth of scholars and not from books [*mi-pi soferim ve-lo mi-pi sefarim*]," encapsulating Judah ha-Levi's argument for the superiority of oral traditions. Mendelssohn's insertion thus served as a most telling corrective to Ibn Ezra.

5. *Kuzari* V:20. Once again, the citation reflected Mendelssohn's light revisions (cf. the Commentary [Meaning] on 11:9 and 12:6).

admonition, when he admonishes with words that are acceptable. All admonition, in any event, truly accomplishes something, and if it sometimes does not deter the obstinate individual from doing wrong, those words of admonition may still ignite his soul like a spark, and he will perceive that deed as wrong; this is the first element of repentance." See the source cited.

they were given by one shepherd [*roʿeh*]:[6] It is possible that [the word *roʿeh*] has the meaning of "thought," as in *you discern my thoughts* [*le-reʿi*] *from afar* °(Ps. 139[:2]), and [like the word] *raʿyon*;[7] as such, *roʿeh* would mean *einer der nachdenkt* [a thinker]. The verse is saying that although all the proverbs, sayings, and principles of wisdom are collected from many books, they combine together to teach knowledge, wisdom, and ethical behavior, as if they were all derived from one thinker and sage.

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12 Beyond them, my son, exercise due care; the making of many books is without limit, and much dabbling wearies the flesh.

Commentary (Words)

12. **dabbling** [*lahag*]: it means reading and studying without understanding.[8]

Commentary (Meaning)

12. **Beyond** what is written in books, **exercise due care**, **my son**, to listen to the words of the wise and to follow in their paths, for the essence is not scholarship, study, and reading, but deeds;[9] that is the purpose and the fundamental essence of everything.

the making of many books is without limit: it is impossible for everything to be written in books, and it is necessary that *the wise man listen and enhance his understanding* on his own (Prov. 1:5) and not rely on book reading; for **much dabbling** without proper understanding **wearies the flesh** and there is benefit for neither the body nor the soul.

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6. Virtually all biblical scholars, medieval and modern, understand the word *roʿeh* to mean "herder" or "shepherd," taking it as an allusion to Moses (Targum, Rashi), God (Sifre), or Solomon (Tosafot). The translation of Qohelet presented here retains that sense in order to underscore Mendelssohn's novel interpretation.

7. See above, 1:17, and cf. his Commentary (Words) on 1:14. The word *raʿyon* also appears in 2:22 and 4:16.

8. Ibn Melekh.

9. Drawing upon M. Avot 1:17.

13 The end of the matter, everything has been heard; fear God and observe His commandments, for this is the whole of man.

Commentary (Words)

13. **The end of the matter** [*sof davar*]: the concluding word and its aim.[10]

Commentary (Meaning)

13. **The end of the matter**: after you have heard all the words of the wise and their arguments and responses, their disputes and agreements, **the end of the matter** is to **fear God and observe His commandments, for this** is man's essence and purpose.

14 For all deeds, God will bring to judgment for everything unknown, whether good or bad.

Commentary (Meaning)

14. **For all deeds** [*maʿaseh*] that man does, **God will bring to judgment**: as such, the word *maʿaseh* is vocalized with a *segol* and is set apart with the cantillation of *zaqef*, since it is not connected with [the word] God.[11]

for everything unknown: all observable deeds will be judged like those that are imperceptible, that is, in accordance with the heart's intentions, be it good or evil.[12] **The end of the matter, everything has been heard; fear God**, etc.[13]

[End of Book]

10. Ibn Melekh.

11. Based on Rashi, with substantial reformulation. The fact that the word *maʿaseh* is vocalized with a *segol* and not a *ṣere* (which would have indicated the construct form) and bears a disjunctive cantillation mark (the *zaqef*) meant that the deeds were not those of God, but of mankind.

12. Ibn Ezra.

13. Mendelssohn repeated v. 13 here in accordance with tradition, which sought to end the public reading of this book on a more positive and constructive note.

IV

SEFER NETIVOT HA-SHALOM [THE PATHS OF PEACE]

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EDITORS' INTRODUCTION

Mendelssohn's Pentateuch translation, extensive introductions, and commentary, published between 1780 and 1783 as *Sefer Netivot ha-Shalom*, realized his early and enduring ambition to revive the study of the Hebrew Bible.[1] The five volumes that comprised this new edition of the Pentateuch were his magnum opus, the crowning achievement of his Hebrew works to which he devoted most of a decade (1774–83). This was not merely a scholarly investment of time: Mendelssohn contributed considerable resources to the project and bore substantial financial risk. He also acted as publisher, appointing agents across Europe to organize pre-subscriptions. These subscriptions helped defray over 70 percent of the costs of publication. Mendelssohn paid the balance himself.[2]

Mendelssohn's other Hebrew works had appeared either anonymously or without fanfare. With the appearance of a prospectus in 1778, the publication of this new edition of the Pentateuch became a noted and even anticipated event among both Jews and non-Jews.[3] Mendelssohn, in fact, had not intended to publicly associate himself with this project, but relented out of economic considerations and the need to enlist subscribers.[4] Still, he kept his name off the title page, an act of characteristic humility that demonstrated the project was in no

1. In the first printed version of his general introduction, Mendelssohn noted the choice of book title in rather unremarkable terms, pointing without comment to Prov. 3:17: "Her ways are pleasant ways, and all her paths are peace." See *JubA*, 14:267. The final revised version of the introduction omitted this passage entirely.

2. Altmann, *Mendelssohn*, 368, 373, 819 n. 34. The total was 3,500 Thalers, of which he paid 1,000.

3. On the prospectus, titled *'Alim li-Terufah*, see ibid., 369–70. The Hebrew prospectus is reprinted in its entirety in *JubA*, 14:321–68. A German translation of part of the prospectus appeared in 1779; it is reprinted in *JubA*, 20,1:286–312.

4. Altmann argued that Mendelssohn wanted to keep the enterprise secret until he "considered it ripe for disclosure." See his letter of May 1779 in *JubA*, 19:252. The same claim is repeated in his signed introduction; see below, pp. 292–93.

way self-aggrandizing but concerned first and foremost with the renewal of Bible study among his fellow Jews. It is worth noting that in the years following the announcement of the Pentateuch edition, most of Mendelssohn's closest non-Jewish friends and correspondents, even those who assisted him in enlisting pre-subscribers, could not fathom his commitment to the tradition of Jewish Bible study, let alone the intellectual and financial resources he invested in the project.[5]

THE TRANSLATION

This edition of the Pentateuch addressed a Jewish audience that was in cultural and linguistic transition. The project, by Mendelssohn's own account, began with a German translation that he had prepared to abet the education of his youngest son—albeit not his daughters—in the study of the Hebrew Bible.[6] But Mendelssohn clearly realized its broader utility for German-speaking Jewry. In the second part of his introduction, he proffered a cultural history of Jewish Bible translations from the Aramaic of late antiquity to the Germanic of early modern Europe. He sketched a recurring historical pattern characteristic of the diaspora: as Jews migrated between different peoples, they "learned the language of the nation that ruled and governed them" and "forgot the language of their forefathers," resulting in their inability to comprehend the Hebrew Bible. To rectify this problem, scholars across the generations produced new translations so that Jews "would understand Scripture and . . . gain an appreciation of the language that had been forgotten."[7] This historical account served to vindicate Mendelssohn's own undertaking by casting it as one link in the long chain of Jewish translations, a chain that originated in Palestine after the Babylonian exile and to which every major diaspora community contributed a new link.

Framed in these historical terms, Mendelssohn's stated aim was to produce a fine translation that directed Jewish readers back to the original Hebrew text. Toward this end he insisted on two criteria: the translation had to be rendered in a polished and articulate vernacular, and it had to conform to traditions of Jewish interpretation. With regard to the quality of the translation, he would settle for nothing less than a Pentateuch translation written in a "refined and correct" High German.[8] The seventeenth-century Judeo-Germanic translations

5. Bertha Badt-Strauss, "Elise Reimarus und Moses Mendelssohn," *Zeitschrift für die Geschichte der Juden in Deutschland* 4 (1932): 179–82. Elise Reimarus disapproved of the Bible project as a retreat from the pure religion of reason. Nevertheless, she solicited pre-subscribers for it. See Altmann, *Mendelssohn*, 393, 395; Weinberg, *Einleitung*, *JubA*, 15,1:xxxvii.

6. *JubA*, 15,1:40; and cf. his letter of 1779, *JubA*, 19:251–52.

7. *JubA*, 15,1:33, and below, p. 276.

8. On Mendelssohn's rejection of linguistic admixtures and his insistence on the use of refined language, be it Hebrew or German, see his letter of August 1782, *JubA*, 13:80.

were woefully inadequate because they made use of an archaic German.[9] Their inadequacy was further exacerbated by their preference for word-by-word rendition: "No one distorts or destroys the intended meaning more than one who preserves the [original] words, or one who translates word for word and particle for particle, even though it initially appears that he is more faithful and diligent in his craft."[10] In order to produce a proper translation, Mendelssohn thought a great deal about common features of language in general and the distinct features of Hebrew and German in particular. He was acutely aware of the infinite challenges of translation and the need for a precise and intimate knowledge of both Hebrew and German. He expended great effort in trying to convey a straightforward sense of the Hebrew text in a manner that conformed to German grammar and syntax. Only such a text, he insisted, should be put in the service of tradition by making the Bible available to those lacking facility in Hebrew.

Regarding the second criterion, Mendelssohn and Solomon Dubno (1738–1813), a first-rate scholar enlisted to produce the Hebrew commentary, used the prospectus to emphasize the need for a translation that conformed to traditions of Jewish interpretation:

> What are we to do for Jewish children, who *run to and fro seeking the word of the Lord*—[desiring] to understand Scripture and to taste the delicacies of its refined expressions in a language familiar to them—*but cannot find it*? (Amos 8:12). In their narrow straits they have *turned to the haughty splendor and alluring deception* (Ps. 40:5) of those who [take] our Torah and *change it into wormwood* (Amos 5:7). *They satisfy themselves with the product of foreigners* (Isa. 2:6) seeking translations of gentile scholars who *turn their back and not their face* (Jer. 32:33) on the trusted interpretations of our Sages, refusing to accept their pure tradition; rather, they interpret it according to *that which occurs to them* (Ez. 20:32), spoiling the vineyard of the Lord of Hosts.[11]

The German translations of Christian scholars were wholly unacceptable. They not only employed Christological interpretations but generally ignored Jewish exegetical traditions, especially rabbinic literature. In the introduction to *Sefer Netivot ha-Shalom*, moreover, Mendelssohn pointed to a more contemporary and insidious problem.

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9. Mendelssohn employed the term *leshon ashkenaz* to refer to both the Judeo-Germanic patois used among European Jews and the *Hochdeutsch* of late-eighteenth-century Prussia. He seems to have regarded the former not as bastardization of proper German but as an older, archaic language that had since evolved. He would no sooner employ that language than an eighteenth-century Englishman would deign to use Shakespearean English.

10. *JubA*, 15,1:33, and below, p. 274.

11. *JubA*, 14:327. Mendelssohn read Isa. 2:6 as per its medieval understanding in the hands of Maimonides and Radaq.

> For Christian translators—who do not have the traditions of our Sages, and who do not heed the *masorah*, not even accepting the vocalization and cantillation that we have in our possession—treat the words of the Torah like a breached wall, everyone contending against it and doing with it as he pleases. They add and delete and change the divine Torah, not only the vowel points and the cantillation, but sometimes even letters and words (for who will stem their senselessness?) according to what they think and perceive. As a result, they sometimes read in the Torah not what is written there, but *that which occurs to them* (Ez. 20:32).[12]

What Mendelssohn saw, as surely none of his rabbinic contemporaries did, was the early gleanings of German text-critical scholarship. Although he dismissed such emendations as capricious, he was cognizant of their deleterious impact on new translations and maintained that a translation that upheld the textual integrity of the Torah was an urgent desideratum.[13]

Mendelssohn's German rendition was a Jewish translation in every respect. First, he printed the German translation in Hebrew letters, a time-honored convention that extended back many centuries to the advent of Judeo-Arabic literature and most notably Saadya Gaon's pioneering Arabic translation.[14] Second, since many biblical names and places were derived from words (or a play on words) associated with some particular event or occurrence, Mendelssohn followed the example of the classical Aramaic translation of Onqelos and other predecessors and preserved such names in their original Hebrew.[15] Exodus 6:3, for example, was translated as "I appeared to Avraham, Yitzhaq, and Yaʿacov . . . ," while Moses remained *Mosheh* and Egypt *Miṣrayim* (rather than *Ägypten*).

Third, and most importantly, Mendelssohn's translation took full account of rabbinic tradition, even as he made every effort to convey the straightforward or plain (*peshaṭ*) meaning of the masoretic text. Drawing upon his introduction to *Megillat Qohelet*, Mendelssohn laid out a clear set of principles:

> In every instance wherein the [rabbinic] *derash* and the *peshaṭ* diverge and are far apart from one another, I sometimes rendered the translation according to the *peshaṭ* alone and sometimes the *derash* alone, and [Dubno] made known my reason for this in his commentary. The principle that we applied with regard to this was to distinguish between something contradictory and divergent. For with regard to things that diverge it is possible that both are equally correct and true . . . When the translator . . . cannot convey both meanings in his translation

12. *JubA*, 15,1:39, and below, p. 290. See also Mendelssohn's letters to an unnamed Christian contemporary, *JubA*, 12,2:33, 42.

13. *JubA*, 12,2:41–43. See Breuer, *Limits*, 147–51, 156–63.

14. See also the discussion regarding Maimonides' use of Hebrew script in Simon Hopkins, "The Languages of Maimonides," in Georges Tamer, ed., *The Trias of Maimonides: Jewish, Arabic, and Ancient Culture of Knowledge* (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2005), 90–93.

15. Mendelssohn explained this in the *Beʾur* to Ex. 2:10.

> and conceal the secondary meaning [i.e., the *derash*] in the shadow of the primary one as it appears in the [Hebrew], he must then choose the primary intended *peshaṭ* meaning . . . and leave the [apprehension of the] *derashah* to one who understands the language of the text being translated. However, if what appears to us to be the scriptural *peshaṭ* contradicts and is contrary to the *derush* received and transmitted to us from the Sages such that the two cannot both be correct—given the impossibility of contradictory statements—it is then incumbent upon us to follow the *derush*, and to translate Scripture accordingly.[16]

The casual reader might glimpse these considerations in the occasional parenthetical comments that Mendelssohn inserted into the German translation. Only careful study of the commentary, expressly written to elucidate and support precisely such choices (see below), reveals the degree to which rabbinic teachings informed the translation.

One singular and novel feature of Mendelssohn's translation was his rendering of the Tetragrammaton as "the Eternal" (*der Ewige*) or "the eternal Being" (*das ewige Wesen*). Onqelos, whose classic Aramaic translation Mendelssohn deemed an important point of reference, rendered the names of God in an inconsistent manner, sometimes using one name (יי"י) for both the Tetragrammaton and Elohim, the other primary biblical name of God.[17] Closer to Mendelssohn's time, the Judeo-Germanic translations of the seventeenth century also melded the names of the biblical deity into one name, *Gott*.[18] Franz Rosenzweig famously pointed to some early modern European sources that rendered the name as *L'Éternel*, although their direct influence on Mendelssohn's thinking is unclear. In fact, Mendelssohn's lengthy explanation in the commentary revealed his deep engagement with biblical, rabbinic, and medieval Jewish sources. He cited the Kabbalistic scholar R. Joseph Giqatillah (1248–1322) and drew upon Maimonides, Nahmanides, and Ibn Ezra as the sources for his choice in translating the Tetragrammaton (see the *Be'ur* to Exodus 3:13–14; 6:2–3).[19]

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16. *JubA*, 15,1:40–41, and below, pp. 293–94.

17. See Mendelssohn's *Be'ur* to Gen. 2:4, where he writes that he could simply not fathom Onqelos' handling of this issue.

18. Altmann, *Mendelssohn*, 409.

19. On Mendelssohn's translation of the Tetragrammaton, see Franz Rosenzweig, "'Der Ewige:' Mendelssohn und der Gottesname," in J. Bergmann et al., eds., *Gedenkbuch für Moses Mendelssohn* (Berlin: Poppelauer, 1929), 96–114 (in English: "'The Eternal:' Mendelssohn and the Name of God," in Martin Buber and Franz Rosenzweig, eds., *Scripture and Translation*, trans. L. Rosenwald with Everett Fox (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1994), 99–113; and Rivka Horwitz, "Mendelssohn's Interpretation of the Tetragrammaton as the Eternal" (in Hebrew), *Jewish Studies* 37 (1997): 185–214. On Mendelssohn's citation of Giqatillah and his exegetical interest in Kabbalistic sources, see Rivka Horwitz, "Kabbalah in the Writings of Mendelssohn and the Berlin Circle of Maskilim," LBIYB 45 (2000): 3–24, esp. 5–6; and Harvey, "Why Philosophers Quote Kabbalah," 122.

THE INTRODUCTIONS

The three-part introduction, *Or li-Netivah* [A Light for the Path], was a scholarly tour de force that one historian has aptly called "the first modern Jewish introduction to the Bible."[20] In the first section, Mendelssohn addressed issues raised by contemporary biblical scholarship, with which he was fully conversant, but he did so in a fairly oblique manner. He offered a sustained defense of the authenticity and authority of the masoretic text by marshalling a range of rabbinic, medieval, and early modern Jewish sources. He forcefully asserted that the Torah had been reliably preserved in its original language and script, down to the vocalization and cantillation.[21] Without mentioning Spinoza by name, Mendelssohn addressed his questions regarding the biblical use of the third person and hence about the traditional belief in Moses' transcription of the Pentateuchal text. He deflected questions about the integrity and corruption of the received text by asserting the reliability and precision of the masoretic tradition.

Mendelssohn also devoted considerable attention to rabbinic passages that critical-minded scholars had cited as proof that the original Hebrew text of the Bible had been altered over time, or worse, purposely changed and corrupted. In every instance, he used medieval and early modern readings and some novel interpretations of his own to deflect the critical claims and harmonize those rabbinic texts with the venerable Jewish notion of the unadulterated preservation of the Torah. Mendelssohn similarly discussed the particular challenge of the Samaritan Pentateuch: complete manuscripts of this Pentateuch had reached Europe in the seventeenth century and were found to contain deviations from the masoretic text. Mendelssohn sought to undermine the worth of the Samaritan version by showing how it was a corrupted copy of the Hebrew original, leavened by insertions and ideological alterations. Finally, with regard to the antiquity of the vocalization and cantillation, Mendelssohn recalled the extended discussion of the positions of Elijah Levita and Azariah de' Rossi, the two early modern Jewish scholars who addressed this issue in depth. In line with the conservative nature of his position on this issue, he dismissed the view of Levita, not incidentally the view favored by non-Jewish scholars who had argued for the late (post-Talmudic) provenance of these diacritical markings.[22]

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20. Bourel, *Mendelssohn*, 370. In the first printed version of the introduction, Mendelssohn explained the title of the introductions with reference to the book title: the introduction served as a light for the paths of peace, which was to say that it would illuminate the approach taken by both translator and exegete. See *JubA*, 14:267.

21. Breuer, *Limits*, 163–75.

22. Johann Semler had translated Levita's book on this subject and dedicated it to Mendelssohn, fully assuming that the latter joined him in dismissing "superstitiously held opinions regarding those twenty-four books"; see *Uebersetzung des Buchs Massoreth Hammassoreth* (Halle: Carl Harmann Hemmerde, 1772), ii [unpaginated]. See also Breuer, *Limits*, 117–18.

The second section of *Or li-Netivah*, as we have already mentioned, proceeded from a reflection on the nature of translation to a cultural history of Jewish Bible translations, with special attention to the Aramaic and Greek versions of late antiquity. After describing the circumstances that engendered his German version, Mendelssohn laid out his method of translation and the fundamental challenge of working with the binary hermeneutics of primary and secondary intended meanings (*peshaṭ* and *derash*). He never wavered from the notion of the simultaneous veracity of these two interpretative modes, a notion predicated on his understanding of the polysemous nature of all artful language, no less true of the biblical text itself.

Mendelssohn further explained how the primary role of the *Be'ur*, the commentary, was to elucidate the interpretative choices embedded in the translation. He made clear that the exegetical project was guided by four outstanding if considerably different medieval biblical exegetes: Solomon b. Isaac (Rashi) and Samuel b. Meir (Rashbam) from eleventh- and twelfth-century France; the twelfth-century Spaniard Abraham Ibn Ezra; and Moses b. Nachman (Ramban), a thirteenth-century Catalan. Mendelssohn also utilized the work of David Kimhi, the widely studied Provençal Jewish philologist of the same era.[23]

Viewed from the perspective of the history of biblical exegesis, the most notable figure on this list was Rashbam. Only a small number of manuscript copies of his commentary survived down to the eighteenth century, and it remained unavailable and virtually unknown to medieval and early modern scholars. Rashbam's commentary, in fact, was printed for the first time only in a Berlin Pentateuch of 1705, appearing alongside the commentaries of Rashi and Ibn Ezra. It was this two-volume work that served as Mendelssohn's primary textual source for his citations of these exegetes as well as the Aramaic translations of Onqelos and Jonathan b. Uzziel.[24] Mendelssohn was thus the first biblical scholar to cite and make broad use of Rashbam's commentary, and in doing so promoted it as one of the "classical" works of medieval exegesis. And yet, for all his appreciation for Rashbam's textual insights, Mendelssohn expressed telling criticism of Rashbam's propensity to delve "very deeply into the scriptural *peshaṭ*, sometimes more than is appropriate." What he meant was spelled out in his preface to the *Be'ur* to Exodus 21. In juxtaposition to Rashbam's stated intention to explain scriptural *peshaṭ* without reference to rabbinic legal interpretations, Mendelssohn wrote that "where something that appears evident from the scriptural *peshaṭ* contradicts a tradition of our Sages concerning *halakhot* and laws, the exegete has an obligation to abandon the *peshaṭ* approach entirely and

23. On these medieval scholars, see the glossary.

24. His citations of Ramban, which was not included in this 1705 Pentateuch, appear to be based upon the Venice 1545 edition.

to follow the path of true tradition, or to effect some compromise if he is able to do so successfully."[25]

This section of the introduction also announced an additional piece of scholarship, namely Dubno's preparation of a series of technical notes to the masoretic text (*Tiqqun Soferim*). The inclusion of such a recondite technical commentary, which was unusual for popular Bibles, reinforced Mendelssohn's singular emphasis on the integrity of the masoretic text.[26] Dubno drew on earlier works of this kind as well as some manuscripts in order to ascertain the correct masoretic text down to the diacritical marks in all its intricate minutiae. Dubno produced the *Tiqqun Soferim* to Genesis and Exodus before leaving the project. Mendelssohn indicated that Shalom of Mezhirech completed the remainder of this technical compilation, although to this day no scholar of this name has been identified.[27]

Mendelssohn devoted the third section of the introduction, "The Parts of Speech and Their Uses in Language," to a discussion of grammatical principles. As already indicated, he was highly sensitive to the fact that a translation from Hebrew to German required accurate and thorough knowledge of both languages. But, referring again to Maimonides' *Millot ha-Higgayon*, he presented something far more fundamental and universal, namely the deep and inseparable connection between logic and grammar. He thus predicated his discussion on universal linguistic principles ("in all languages," or more modestly, "in the languages with which I am familiar"), which then served as a basis to compare Hebrew and German to both those principles and to each other. He attended to the distinct linguistic qualities of Hebrew but, in typical Mendelssohnian fashion, defined its singularity in relation to universal human speech.

THE *BE'UR* [COMMENTARY][28]

Mendelssohn had originally intended for Dubno to produce the *Be'ur* to the entire Pentateuch, with the exception of the first lection in Genesis (1:1–6:8), which he reserved for himself.[29] As the magnitude of the project became apparent, Mendelssohn assumed responsibility for the commentary to Exodus and en-

25. Mendelssohn's otherwise extensive use and appreciation of Rashbam's commentary underscored the fact that this critique was limited to texts of a legal import.

26. Breuer, *Limits*, 174.

27. Although some later editions refer to him more helpfully as Shalom b. Isaac Dayan, or ha-Kohen, of Mezhirech, it is not clear on what basis this information was added, nor has it helped in identifying the author. The mystery surrounding his identity prompts one to wonder whether this may have been another of Mendelssohn's literary fictions, along the lines employed in *Qohelet Musar*. Might the author have been Mendelssohn himself? One can only speculate.

28. On the vocalization *Be'ur* rather than *Bi'ur*, see the general introduction to this volume, n. 1.

29. Whether Mendelssohn specifically wanted to contribute the opening chapters of the *Be'ur* to Genesis, or whether he had already written (or had begun to write) it before Dubno's full

trusted Leviticus to another fine scholar, Naphtali Herz Wessely (1725–1805).[30] Dubno, as it happened, left the project and Berlin in autumn, 1780,[31] and Mendelssohn then enlisted two younger writers, Aaron Jaroslav (Aaron Zechariah Friedenthal) and Naphtali Herz Homberg (1749–1841), to produce the *Be'ur* to Numbers and Deuteronomy, respectively.[32] Mendelssohn contributed many notes to the Leviticus and Numbers volumes, inserting them as bracketed notes into the body of the commentaries.[33] The authorship of the final printed commentary to Deuteronomy is somewhat unclear, but the evidence suggests that in the end, the *Be'ur* to this volume was largely written by Mendelssohn.[34]

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commitment to the project is not clear. Mendelssohn mentioned his authorship of the opening chapters of Genesis toward the end of the second section of *Or li-Netivah*, where he also noted that "R. Dubno added matters pertaining to grammar." Although Mendelssohn's commentaries contained their own grammatical analyses, one can detect Dubno's dozen or so additions by their style and length. There is, however, evidence of two authorial hands at work on these opening chapters of Genesis, and it appears that Dubno contributed somewhat more material and may have given this pericope its final edit. See, e.g., the *Be'ur* to 2:9, 11, and 3:8. Although it may not be possible to draw a definitive line around their individual contributions, one can and should assume Mendelssohn's substantive imprint on the final version.

30. Dubno had begun to work on the Exodus commentary before Mendelssohn decided to take it upon himself, and left various notes behind in the latter's possession; see Altmann, *Mendelssohn*, 406. Mendelssohn included Dubno's notes in brackets in the body of the *Be'ur* to Exodus. These notes are not included in the present volume. On Wessely, see below, p. 297 and n. 117.

31. For a review of the circumstances, which have been disputed and exploited for polemical and ideological reasons, see Altmann, *Mendelssohn*, 398–405.

32. The second part of the introduction does not mention these two contributors by name, but Homberg's participation is made clear from Mendelssohn's correspondence in the fall of 1782; see n. 34 below. Jaroslav's involvement is attested by the editor of *Ha-Me'assef* 8 (1809): 352, correcting an earlier assertion (ibid., 240) that Wessely had authored the *Be'ur* to Numbers and Deuteronomy.

33. Although Altmann suggested that the *Be'ur* to Numbers was "in the main" written by Mendelssohn himself, the evidence for this assertion is unclear. The fact that he was careful to bracket his own comments would appear to indicate otherwise. Nonetheless, there is no way to determine the extent to which he may have also edited and revised the main part of the commentary. See Altmann, *Mendelssohn*, 416–17.

34. It appears that at some point after beginning the Exodus commentary or Dubno's departure, Mendelssohn assumed responsibility for the *Be'ur* to Deuteronomy as well. Having written about a quarter of this commentary by the summer of 1782, Mendelssohn turned to Homberg to complete the remaining sections, and Homberg complied and submitted his work within three months. Mendelssohn reviewed Homberg's work and, by his own testimony, subjected it to a "fairly free" revision. In the summer of 1783, after *Sefer Netivot ha-Shalom* had been published, Mendelssohn wrote to Homberg rather candidly that "your first work was certainly not worthy of you," indicating his displeasure with Homberg's contribution and, in retrospect, his reason for the "free" revisions. See *JubA*, 13:63–64, 67–68, 71–72, 82–86, 93–95, 116–17. The Deuteronomy volume included no comments demarcated with brackets, and no obvious way to distinguish between Mendelssohn's words and possible vestiges of Homberg's contribution.

Three decades later Homberg produced a supercommentary on the *Be'ur* titled *Ha-Korem* for the 1818 Vienna edition of *Sefer Netivot ha-Shalom* (see below). In the Deuteronomy volume, Homberg continued to refer to the original *Be'ur* as a work of joint authorship, noting en passant that "in *our* commentary *we* wrote" or "*we* stated" and "*we* explained" (see, e.g., 2:27, 14:21, 26:15).

There are a number of salient characteristics to note in the sections of the *Be'ur* that Mendelssohn penned. First, the *ṭe'amim* or cantillation (also referred to as accentuation) had generally received only sporadic attention in pre-modern Jewish exegesis. As part of his recurring focus on the fundamentally oral nature of ancient biblical transmission, and in line with his insistence on the qualitative distinctiveness of the Hebrew Bible, Mendelssohn advanced the use of the *ṭe'amim* as an incisive exegetical tool.[35] He utilized their relative conjunctive and disjunctive values to analyze the connection between words and clauses, thereby gaining further grammatical and syntactic insight into the biblical text.[36] This analysis also served his ongoing effort to demonstrate the exegetical perspicacity of the Sages and a compass in navigating among the exegetes' competing interpretations.[37]

A second feature of note was Mendelssohn's sustained attention to biblical poetics, once again informed by his appreciation for the nature of oral instruction and transmission. His introduction to the Song at the Sea (Exodus 15) offered an extended discussion of biblical poetics, which he distinguished qualitatively from classical Greek and Latin poetry: whereas the latter aimed to satisfy "the ear alone," the former sought to penetrate the listener's heart and soul. The distinct parallelisms of biblical poetry functioned both as heuristic and mnemonic devices, being readily comprehended and easily remembered.

A third feature of Mendelssohn's commentary was his handling of the post-biblical texts that served as his primary source material, especially the Aramaic translations and medieval commentators printed in the Berlin 1705 Pentateuch. On the one hand, he was greatly concerned with the accuracy of these texts. He was quick to note discrepancies and alternative renderings, and availed himself of a few manuscripts of Rashi and Rashbam's commentaries in order to obtain a better reading, correct an evident error, or, in a few cases, to point to a suggestive alternative interpretation.[38] On the other hand, paradoxically, his quest for tex-

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But Homberg's introduction also included an unqualified claim that Mendelssohn approved of his commentary. (Note that Mendelssohn's letters were first published decades later.) Homberg's supercommentary also spoke of "*now* changing *our* minds" despite the fact that there is absolutely no evidence of Mendelssohn's continued work on the *Be'ur*, not to mention that Mendelssohn died decades earlier (see 2:6, 9:28). In light of such comments, it is unclear how seriously to take Homberg's continued claims of a joint authorship, and there is room for skepticism. Nevertheless, the fact that Mendelssohn vetted, edited, and revised this commentary allows us to read it as reflecting his exegetical approach and ideas.

35. On the *ṭe'amim*, see *Or li-Netivah* below, pp. 251–53, 294. It should be noted that Dubno shared this appreciation of the *ṭe'amim*, and perhaps even influenced Mendelssohn in this regard. For a full treatment of this subject, see the dissertation of Edward Levenson cited below, n. 80.

36. Levenson, *Mendelssohn*, 21–64. See, e.g., the *Be'ur* to Ex. 20:2 and 23:2.

37. See, e.g., the *Be'ur* to Ex. 3:12.

38. On his use of the Rashi manuscripts at his disposal, see *Or li-Netivah*, pp. 295–96, and the *Be'ur* to Ex. 20:7, 32:7, and 32:13. For other examples not included in this volume, see Ex. 15:1, 16:5, 25:22, 26:13, 27:5, 28:37.

tual accuracy was tempered by a desire for clarity and a habit of "improving" the medieval texts he cited.[39] Mendelssohn regularly added, deleted, or transposed words or phrases in his citations, even when quoting directly. In such cases, he made no pretense of painstaking scholarly redaction or ferreting out some textual corruption. His motivation, rather, was to clarify the citation in ways that fully preserved the author's intent while easing the way for his readers.

Finally, and most importantly, was his appropriation of pre-modern biblical exegesis. Mendelssohn, it should be noted, hardly limited himself to the scholars he cited by name in his introduction. He made occasional use of late medieval and early modern exegetes such as Obadiah Sforno, Isaac Abarbanel, Elijah Mizrahi, and Solomon ben Melekh. He drew liberally upon philosophical classics of medieval Jewish literature (e.g., Judah ha-Levi's *Kuzari* and Maimonides' *Guide of the Perplexed*) and a variety of other works ranging from Moses of Coucy's *Sefer Miṣvot ha-Gadol* to Joseph Giqatilla's *Ginnat Egoz*, as well as the *Zohar*. Yet, when all was said and done, the commentary remained heavily indebted to one or another of the four medieval exegetes he had listed (Rashi, Rashbam, Ibn Ezra, Ramban) whether or not he cited them directly or explicitly.

At first glance, Mendelssohn's reliance on earlier scholarship appears almost disconcertingly slavish, especially in light of his own scholarly abilities, to say nothing of his independent-mindedness. Yet such a perception is misguided and fails to grasp the scholarly heart of his endeavor. Mendelssohn understood himself to be participating in a vital exegetical tradition, a Jewish tradition that was both coherent and fully rooted in rabbinic literature. He conceived of the millennium-long chain of Jewish biblical exegesis as an extended conversation with rabbinic literature and its readings of Scripture, and it was a conversation that he wanted his readers to appreciate.

Two features of the *Be'ur* bring his approach to light. First, Mendelssohn often spliced and melded the comments of one medieval exegete into another, garnering their insights in support of his own reading of the text, even when he disagreed with their interpretations: the uninitiated reader, however, could read such passages as one seamless explication. Second, he regularly engaged rabbinic sources directly, whether or not they were explicitly cited in the commentaries. Mendelssohn, to be sure, did not deny the evident disagreement, sometimes vehement, between medieval exegetes, nor did he hide his willingness to reject their readings and assert his independence.[40] Rather, he assumed that underlying those medieval differences lay a set of shared reference points, if not an unstated concurrence, regarding the basic textual and narrative elements

39. For examples of this in *Megillat Qohelet*, see his Commentary (Meaning) on 11:9, 12:6, 11.

40. In a few cases, at least, Mendelssohn sought to attenuate the clash by omitting the harsh invective they occasionally directed at each other.

of a biblical passage. Moreover, he sought to connect these points of textual concordance with rabbinic readings. Mendelssohn, in other words, worked with a clear sense of a Jewish interpretative tradition, with rabbinic literature serving as the foundation upon which all subsequent Jewish exegesis was constructed, and the spring from which later interpretations flowed. Whether elaborating the *peshaṭ*, which the Sages were presumed to have mastered, or explicating rabbinic passages, the *Be'ur* was centripetal in its handling of rabbinic and medieval sources. The commentary's ultimate goal was to expose and explicate this tradition of interpretation. In sum, Mendelssohn was wary of overt or forced harmonizations, and he did not attempt to explain away the plethora of interpretative choices. He was also sufficiently confident of his mastery of exegetical traditions to assert his own independent readings. Weaving his *Be'ur* from the strands of rabbinic and medieval exegesis, Mendelssohn sought to affirm the broad coherence of this tradition by showing his readers its well-worn paths.

PUBLICATION HISTORY

Sefer Netivot ha-Shalom was one of the best-published and well-received Hebrew works of the nineteenth century. The first edition had 515 subscribers who purchased almost 750 copies; they were dominated by Jewish communal leaders from across Central Europe, and especially the new urban settlements of north-central Europe, e.g., Berlin, Copenhagen, Königsberg, and Vienna.[41] This edition carried three approbations, including one from the Chief Rabbi of Berlin, R. Hirschel Lewin.[42] Subsequent editions enjoyed even wider distribution and popularity over the next century. Although there is no detailed and authoritative account of this publication history, scholars have identified over two dozen editions before 1900.[43]

These editions displayed tremendous variation in reprinting the various components of *Sefer Netivot ha-Shalom*.[44] This is especially true among the first

41. Lowenstein, *Readership*, 31–34, 45–61.

42. Altmann, *Mendelssohn*, 379–80. For a discussion of later editions see Hildesheimer, *Mendelssohn*, 89–90.

43. Weinberg, *Einleitung*, cii–cxii; Lowenstein, *Readership*, 36–37. Given that the present volume deals only with the writings of Mendelssohn, it should be clear that the discussion provided here does not extend to the publication of the *Be'ur* to the Prophets and Writings. Those texts and their publication history require separate treatment.

44. The variation discussed here refers to the subsequent republication of the components of the original Mendelssohn Bible as it appeared upon completion in spring 1783. With regard to the *text* of those individual components, note the following: (1) The German translation. Through all subsequent reprintings in Hebrew script and transcriptions into German Gothic or Latin script, the translation maintained a very high degree of fidelity to the original edition of 1780–83. The changes that appeared were of three kinds: (i) the orthographical transcription of Mendelssohn's German in Hebrew script underwent almost immediate adjustment (e.g., adding *aleph* or *'ayin* to words like *der* and *das*, or changing the last letter of the transcription of *Ewige* from *yud*

dozen editions to appear before 1815. Two early editions printed Mendelssohn's translation in Hebrew script as a one-volume stand-alone text, while another included the translation with only the Hebrew Pentateuch.[45] In contrast, the Fürth and Prague editions of 1802 reproduced all the components of the original Mendelssohn Bible. They also began to turn the full five-volume work into a Bible designed for study and synagogue use by adding the Aramaic translation of Onqelos and appending the supplementary readings from the Prophets (the *haftarot*). The Fürth edition also included the commentary to Rashi as well as the five scrolls, and added the Sabbath liturgy at the back of each volume.[46] Two editions published by the Christian-owned Viennese press of Anton Schmid did not initially follow this pattern, choosing to reprint only the translation and the *Be'ur* but not the *Tiqqun Soferim*.[47] With the third Schmid Viennese edition of 1818, as with other major printings until mid-century, commercial publishers turned *Sefer Netivot ha-Shalom* into a standard study Bible that almost always offered Onqelos and Rashi alongside Mendelssohn's translation and the *Be'ur*. Beginning with this 1818 edition, publishers also added supercommentaries to the Mendelssohn Bible, with the Viennese edition of 1846 including three such works.[48]

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to *'ayin*); (ii) the correction of typographical errors; and (iii) the rare replacement of one word with another (e.g., in Ex. 32:34, where *herziehen* was changed to *hergehen*). Very few of these alterations amounted to a substantive change of Mendelssohn's translation. (2) The introductions. *Or li-Netivah* first appeared as a separate essay in December 1782, but was then reprinted in a different format and distributed with the final volume around Passover 1783. The earlier version of this introduction contained a paragraph (later deleted) stating that Mendelssohn was only issuing it as an advance edition (and in a limited printing of only 300 copies) due to demand. The final version yielded Mendelssohn's own revision, including some lines and sentences and, in the case just mentioned, an entire paragraph. All subsequent editions that included the introductory essays reprinted the final version with very few corrections or changes. (3) The *Tiqqun Soferim*, as will be mentioned below, was less frequently reprinted, and it appeared in either the full version identical to the original, or in a significantly condensed version.

45. The first two appeared in Karlsruhe (1793) and Offenbach (1811), and the third in Sulzbach (1798). The German translation in these editions was printed in a semi-cursive variant of Rashi script.

46. All these additions, minus the Sabbath liturgy, also appeared in an 1808 Offenbach edition, reprinted there in 1821–24. The earlier Sulzbach 1798 printing also included the *haftarot* and the five scrolls.

47. Vienna 1795 and 1808. After the first decade of the nineteenth century, most Central European editions omitted the highly technical *Tiqqun Soferim*; one exception was the Fürth 1824 edition, which reproduced the earlier 1802 edition. The Berlin 1831–33 edition, published under the title *Ḥumash Meqor Hayyim*, included a condensed version of these notes as *Qiṣṣur Tiqqun Soferim*.

48. The Vienna 1818 edition printed the first such supercommentary, Herz Homberg's *Ha-Korem* (see above, n. 34), and the Schmid publishing house made it a regular feature of its subsequent editions of 1832 and 1837. The Berlin 1831–33 edition included Jeremiah Heinemann's *Be'ur la-Talmid*. Moses Landau's edition (Prague 1833–36) added notes written by himself and Wolf Mayer titled *Ha-Me'amer*. The Vienna 1846 edition had *Ha-Korem*, Samuel David Luzzatto's *Ha-Mishtadel*, and Simon Szantó's *Boṣer 'Olelot*.

Four editions of the Mendelssohn Bible were published in Eastern Europe in the nineteenth century. The Warsaw edition of 1836–37, which appeared with an ample list of subscribers, came equipped as a study Bible designed for use in synagogue: it contained all the components of the original *Sefer Netivot ha-Shalom* with the addition of Onqelos, Rashi, the *haftarot*, five scrolls, and the Sabbath prayers.[49] The Vilna edition of 1847–53, which reportedly sold 3,000 copies, contained almost all the same features.[50] The third Eastern European edition appeared in 1852 with a number of variations. One version, printed entirely in Vilna, contained Mendelssohn's introductions and the *Be'ur* but omitted the German translation.[51] The other version also contained a section that read left to right, which included Mendelssohn's translation in Gothic script (*Fraktur*), along with a new German commentary by the publisher Leon Joseph Mandelstamm and J. Herxheimer.[52] The last nineteenth-century edition of *Sefer Netivot ha-Shalom* was published in Warsaw in 1887–88.[53]

The 1852 Vilna edition was not the first that published the translation in Gothic script. In 1780, Mendelssohn assisted a German theologian in producing a transcription of the translation, although they completed only Genesis.[54] A complete stand-alone edition of the transcribed translation appeared in 1815, this one clearly designed for synagogue use.[55] Some years later there appeared other synagogue editions, this time with facing Hebrew and German text.[56] The 1843–45 Collected Works (*Gesammelte Schriften*) also reproduced the translation in Gothic script. A Prague edition of 1860–62 contained all the traditional

49. Majer Balaban, "Polnische Übersetzungen und Editionen der Werke Moses Mendelssohn," *Zeitschrift für die Geschichte der Juden in Deutschland* 1 (1929–30): 3, 267. The Warsaw edition of 1836–37 also included David Friedländer's 1786 German translation of the prayers.

50. This Vilna edition only differed in that it included a condensed version of the *Tiqqun Soferim* and two brief supercommentaries to Genesis by the publisher, Adam ha-Kohen Lebensohn: *Be'urim Yeshenim*, an anthology of new nineteenth-century exegesis (Luzzatto, Meklenburg, Gra, etc.), and *Be'urim Ḥadashim*, comprised of his own exegetical notes. See Lowenstein, *Readership*, 41–44; Weinberg, *Einleitung*, cxi.

51. This version also contained Onqelos and Rashi, and Homberg's *Ha-Korem*.

52. Mandelstamm wrote the commentary on Genesis and Exodus, while Herxheimer contributed the remainder.

53. This edition was also published with an eye toward traditional synagogue use. Like other editions, it omitted the *Tiqqun Soferim* and added two supercommentaries, *Ha-Korem* and *Ha-Me'amer*.

54. The theologian was Josias Friedrich Christian Löffler (1752–1816). Earlier, Christian Gottlob Meyer had transcribed the translations that appeared in the prospectus; see Weinberg, *Einleitung*, xlvii.

55. *Die fünf Bücher Moses übersetzt von Moses Mendelssohn für Bibelfreunde aller Konfessionen, und zunächst für Israeliten gedruckt* (Dessau, 1815), published by David Fränkel and M. Bock, which divided the text according to the public Sabbath reading of the weekly portion. Peter Beer published *Die mosaischen Schriften, übersetzt nach Mendelssohn und mit erläuternden Anmerkungen* (Prague: Sommer, 1815), but despite its title this edition deviated substantially from Mendelssohn's German translation.

56. E.g., Sulzbach, 1839; Fürth, 1860.

elements of a study and synagogue Bible but printed the German translation in Gothic rather than Hebrew script.

Given the large number of editions, their geographical distribution, and the many thousands of subscribers, it is clear that the Mendelssohn Bible found its way to Jewish communities and families across Central Europe, and, to a lesser degree, Eastern Europe. Some of these editions carried new approbations by leading rabbis and listed others among the subscribers.[57] The Mendelssohn Pentateuch thus became a standard fixture in homes, schools, and synagogues. The ramified impact of these volumes on Jewish Bible study and exegesis in the nineteenth century is an important chapter in European Jewry's intellectual history.[58]

EARLY RECEPTION AMONG GERMAN SCHOLARS

Mendelssohn's Bible garnered attention among non-Jewish scholars from the start. Johann Christian Döderlein (1746–92), Professor of Theology at Altdorf and Jena, noted positively the prospectus for the project, but tellingly praised samples of the German translation as "pure and correct in expression, without a mixture of Judaizing formulations." Döderlein had less regard for the commentary, suffused as it was with rabbinic learning; it was "neither to the taste of, nor of value to, Christian exegetes."[59] In his lengthy review of the completed project, he praised Mendelssohn for having rendered "his nation" a true service, asserting that no contemporary Christian had "produced such a noble version of the Pentateuch." His primary reservation was that the translation was unduly difficult for most "native Jews [*innländischen Juden*]" to understand, let alone appreciate.[60] Nevertheless, he was certain that with proper exertion, it would contribute to their "good taste and language knowledge."[61] He deemed the work an "effective means of enlightenment . . . [for] this nation whose education (*Bildung*) has been so neglected."[62] Inter alia, he complimented Mendelssohn's explanation of the abundant anthropomorphisms in the opening chapters of Genesis.[63] At the same time, Döderlein was quick to express his exasperation with Mendelssohn and Dubno for adhering to the masoretic text and rejecting the emendations that Kennicott and others had proposed. He further

57. On the rabbinic reception of this work in the nineteenth century, see the general introduction above, pp. 9–12.

58. See Edward Breuer and Chanan Gafni, "Jewish Biblical Scholarship between Tradition and Innovation," in Magne Saebo, ed., *Hebrew Bible/Old Testament: The History of Its Interpretation* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2012), III/1: 262–303.

59. *Theologische Bibliothek* vol. 1 no. 2, (Leipzig, 1780): 156–58.

60. *Theologische Bibliothek* vol. 3 no. 1, (Leipzig, 1784): 2–4.

61. Ibid., 5.

62. Ibid., 26–27.

63. Ibid., 15.

emphasized the patent tension between Mendelssohn's astute exegetical judgment and the inaccuracies of the masoretic text.[64] Finally, he could not resist some Christian polemicizing, noting that the cultic laws in Leviticus provided "certain and strong proof against arguments for the continuing validity of the Mosaic religion." Not only have those laws not been observed for centuries, he wrote, but many of them defied understanding.[65]

Another lengthy review, published anonymously but later identified as being that of a Professor of Greek and Oriental Languages by the name of Johann Bernhard Köhler (1742–1802), appeared in the *Allgemeine Deutsche Bibliothek*, a major journal to which Mendelssohn had contributed. In his review of the Genesis volume, Köhler examined Mendelssohn's translation in great detail, displaying familiarity with Jewish exegetical literature.[66] He found much to praise in individual passages of the volume, yet objected to the "many Hebraisms" and "turns of phrase common to Jews." Using Luther's translation as a standard for "correct and pure German," he deemed Mendelssohn's rendering "not quite so pure German as we presumed of such an author."[67] Similarly, in his review of Leviticus, Köhler again criticized a particular translation for being "very un-German and unintelligible."[68] Nevertheless, he expressed satisfaction with the *Be'ur*, deeming it to be "extremely useful for Christian biblical exegetes as well."[69]

EARLIER TRANSLATIONS OF THE INTRODUCTIONS AND THE *BE'UR*

For the first half-century following the publication of *Sefer Netivot ha-Shalom*, the introductions and the *Be'ur* remained the exclusive province of those with the requisite Hebrew skills. In 1847, Hermann Jolowicz, who had prepared the Pentateuch translation for inclusion in the *Collected Works*, published a German translation of the three sections of the *Or li-Netivah*.[70] In 1860, an English translation of the introduction began to appear in *The Hebrew Review* in serialized form, but only about half was completed.[71] A few years later another similarly

64. Ibid., 12–13, 18–19.

65. Ibid., 21.

66. *Allgemeine Deutsche Bibliothek* 44.1 (1780): 226–45.

67. Ibid., 227–28.

68. *Allgemeine Deutsche Bibliothek*, supplement to volumes 37–52 (1785): 743.

69. Ibid., 751.

70. *Moses Mendelssohn's allgemeine Einleitung in die fünf Bücher Moses* (Cöslin: C.G. Hendess, 1847); it was published with a brief foreword and no annotations or notes. See the general introduction above, p. 7.

71. The journal, edited by M.H. Bresslau, was titled *Ha-Me'assef*: *The Hebrew Review and Magazine for Jewish Literature*—New Series (1860). The entire first section and about half of the middle section of *Or li-Netivah* were serialized in twelve parts.

short-lived English journal began to reprint this same translation, but this too remained incomplete.[72] In 1872 an Anglo-Jewish group, the Society for Hebrew Literature, published a *Miscellany of Hebrew Literature*, and one of the selections included a translation of the *Be'ur* to Genesis 2.[73]

Another century passed before renewed efforts were made to translate either the Hebrew introduction or selections of the *Be'ur*. Mendelssohn's introductory paragraphs to Exodus 20 were translated into English in 1978.[74] In 1983, David Sandmel translated the first two sections of *Or li-Netivah* and the *Be'ur* to the first lection in Genesis (1:1–6:8) as a Hebrew Union College thesis.[75] A decade later, the modern multi-volume edition of Mendelssohn's collected writings finally included a German translation of all three sections of *Or li-Netivah*, and more recently, a volume of selections from the *Be'ur*.[76] In 2011, Michah Gottlieb published a one-volume translation of Mendelssohn's German and Hebrew writings that included a selection of texts culled from the introductions and the *Be'ur*.[77]

SCHOLARLY LITERATURE

The scholarly treatment of Mendelssohn's Pentateuch dates from the second quarter of the twentieth century. An English article appeared in the Hebrew Union College Annual in 1929.[78] In 1940, Peretz Sandler wrote the first substantial monograph on *Sefer Netivot ha-Shalom*, but its impact on scholarship was limited.[79]

Three decades would elapse before scholars began to study this Bible in a more sustained fashion. Edward Levenson, a student of Alexander Altmann, produced a fine dissertation on some of the literary aspects of Mendelssohn's

72. *Kenesset Yisra'el*: *The Hebrew National* appeared in 1867 in two volumes; only half of the first section of the introduction was printed in three installments in volume II.

73. "Specimen of the Biur," 13–62; the translator was Abraham Benisch.

74. Edward Levenson, "Moses Mendelssohn's Introduction to the Ten Commandments," *Gratz College Annual of Jewish Studies* 7 (1978): 13–22.

75. David Fox Sandmel, *A Translation and Critical Analysis of Sections I and II of Moses Mendelssohn's Introduction to His Commentary (Bi'ur) on the Pentateuch as well as the Part of the Genesis Commentary Written by Himself* (thesis, Hebrew Union College, 1983).

76. The translation of the introduction appeared in *Schriften zum Judentum* III,1/*JubA* 9,1, published in 1993. The selections of the *Be'ur* appeared in *Schriften zum Judentum* III,1 (*JubA*, 9,3) in 2009. An accompanying volume with annotations is scheduled to be published as *Schriften zum Judentum* III,2/*JubA*, 9,4.

77. *Moses Mendelssohn: Writings on Judaism, Christianity and the Bible* (Waltham, MA: Brandeis University Press, 2011), 189–229.

78. Henry Englander, "Mendelssohn as Translator and Exegete," *Hebrew Union College Annual* 6 (1929): 327–48.

79. *Ha-Be'ur la-Torah shel Moshe Mendelson ve-Si'ato*.

exegetical approach.[80] Altmann himself devoted 50 pages of his Mendelssohn biography to the Bible project, although only a handful of those pages discussed the substance of the introductions or the commentary. In the 1980s, Werner Weinberg penned a number of chapters and articles on different aspects of the translations and commentaries. Of these, the essay "Language Questions Relating to Moses Mendelssohn's Pentateuch Translation" offered some new and important perspectives.[81] In 1990, he also contributed a lengthy and detailed introduction to the full reproduction of the Mendelssohn Bible in the *Gesammelte Schriften Jubiläumsausgabe*.[82]

The editors of this volume have also tried to shed light on different contextual aspects of this edition of the Pentateuch. In *The Limits of Enlightenment: Jews, Germans and the Eighteenth-Century Study of Scripture*, Breuer pointed to Mendelssohn's fidelity to rabbinic and medieval biblical scholarship and his efforts to defend it against the beginnings of German textual criticism and a renewed European antipathy to rabbinic exegesis.[83] In *Moses Mendelssohn and the Religious Enlightenment*, Sorkin located the Bible project alongside the other Hebrew works in assessing Mendelssohn as a Jewish thinker.[84] In response, Michael Stanislawski challenged the conservatism imputed to Mendelssohn in these monographs on the basis of his own reading of Exodus 19 and 20.[85]

The past two decades have brought a steady stream of essays that analyze different aspects of Mendelssohn's biblical scholarship as a means of gaining insight into his thinking and locating his distinct place in the history of Jewish thought. Raphael Jospe drew upon the *Be'ur* as a means of delineating Mendelssohn's thought in comparison to his medieval predecessors, especially Judah ha-Levi and Abraham Ibn Ezra.[86] Daniel Krochmalnik subjected Mendelssohn's commentary to Genesis 1 to philosophical analysis, in this case utilizing the writings

80. *Moses Mendelssohn's Understanding of the Logico-Grammatical and Literary Construction in the Pentateuch: A Study of His German Translation and Hebrew Commentary (the Bi'ur)* (PhD Dissertation, Brandeis University, 1972).

81. *Hebrew Union College Annual* 55 (1984): 197–242. Weinberg published another piece in French, "Les traductions et commentaries de Mendelssohn" in Yvon Belaval and Dominique Bourel, eds., *Le siècle des Lumières et la Bible* (Paris: Beauchesne, 1986), 599–621, which then appeared as "Moses Mendelssohn's Biblical Translations and Commentaries" in *Approaches to Ancient Judaism* [New Series] 1 (1990): 11–35. This article added little to Altmann's work and shared its shortcomings. Weinberg also penned a short piece, "Moses Mendelssohn's 'Biur,' Two Hundred Years Later," *Jewish Book Annual* 40 (1982–83): 97–104.

82. *JubA*, 15,1:xi–cliv.

83. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Center for Judaic Studies, 1996.

84. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996.

85. "Towards an Analysis of the Bi'ur as Exegesis: Moses Mendelssohn's Commentary to the Revelation at Sinai," in Yaakov Elman, Ephraim Halivni, and Z. Steinfelf, eds., *Neti'ot LeDavid: Jubilee Volume for David Weiss Halivni* (Jerusalem: Orhot, 2004), 136–52.

86. See, among other essays, "Biblical Exegesis as a Philosophic Literary Genre: Abraham Ibn Ezra and Moses Maimonides," in Emil Fackenheim and R. Jospe, eds., *Jewish Philosophy and the Academy* (Madison, NJ: Farleigh Dickinson University Press, 1996), 48–92.

of Leibniz as a point of reference.[87] Jean Lederman contended that, through its "Enlightenment philosophy," the *Be'ur* attempted to transform the "ghetto Jew" into a "man" and then a "citizen."[88] Warren Harvey compared Mendelssohn and Solomon Maimon to Maimonides and to each other on the rationality of ethics, drawing on their respective readings of selected passages in Genesis.[89] Elsewhere, Harvey pointed to ways in which Mendelssohn's exegetical handling of divine and earthly kingship complemented and buttressed his more extensive articulation in *Jerusalem*.[90] Gideon Freudenthal undertook a broader inquiry into the thought of Mendelssohn and Maimon, utilizing the *Be'ur* to offer novel insight into Mendelssohn's oeuvre.[91] Finally, assessing Mendelssohn's legacy in twentieth-century German-Jewish culture, Abigail Gillman has compared his approach to translation with that of Martin Buber and Franz Rosenzweig.[92]

NOTES TO THE TRANSLATION

The following translations are based upon the edition Mendelssohn completed in the spring of 1783. Mendelssohn had first printed and distributed his three-part introduction before the fifth and final volume had appeared; it differed slightly from the version published in the completed five-volume edition of 1783. That final edition, including a revised version of the introduction, served as the basis of all subsequent eighteenth- and nineteenth-century editions, and it is the text used in this volume as well.

All verses from the Pentateuch, both those explicated by Mendelssohn and those cited throughout as prooftexts and passing references, are rendered according to his German translation. Similarly, Mendelssohn's German translation of Psalms was used in rendering citations from that book. Citations from other biblical books are generally drawn from the 1985 Jewish Publication Society English translation, with some adaptation for context and consistency. As we noted above, Mendelssohn insisted on transliterating all personal and place names in his German translation, rather than using their Western equivalents. We have preserved this preference in all translated or cited scriptural verses

87. "Die Aufgeklärte Schöpfung: Zur Übersetzung des Biur von Moses Mendelssohn," in Johannes Heil and D. Krochmalnik, eds., *Jüdische Studien als Disziplin—Die Disziplinen der Jüdischen Studien* (Heidelberg: Universitätsverlag Winter, 2010), 237–75.

88. *La Philosophie des Lumières dans l'exégèse de Moses Mendelssohn* (Paris: Honoré Champion Éditeur, 2013).

89. "Mendelssohn and Maimon on the Tree of Knowledge," 185–92.

90. "Mendelssohn's Heavenly Politics," in Alfred Ivry, E. Wolfson, and Allan Arkush, eds., *Perspectives on Jewish Thought and Mysticism* (Amsterdam, 1998), 403–12.

91. Freudenthal, *Religion*.

92. "Between Religion and Culture: Mendelssohn, Buber, Rosenzweig and the Enterprise of Biblical Translation," in Fred Knobloch, ed., *Biblical Translation in Context* (Bethesda: University Press of Maryland, 2002), 93–114.

but otherwise reverted to English equivalents; the reader will thus find both Mosheh and Moses, Miṣrayim and Egypt.

The lengthy citation of Azariah de' Rossi's *Me'or ʿEnayim* that appears in Mendelssohn's preface to the Song of the Sea (Ex. 15:1) made use of two translations: James L. Kugel, *The Idea of Biblical Poetry* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1981), 200–201; and Adele Berlin, *Biblical Poetry through Medieval Jewish Eyes* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1991), 147–49.

OR LI-NETIVAH [A LIGHT FOR THE PATH][1] A GENERAL INTRODUCTION TO ALL FIVE BOOKS [OF THE PENTATEUCH]

[Section I]

This Torah which Moses set before the children of Israel (Deut. 4:44) is divided into five books, and they are: (**I**) **Genesis**, which includes the account of creation,[2] the flood, the story of the holy patriarchs and all that happened to them until Jacob and his sons went to Egypt, and the deaths of Jacob and Joseph. (**II**) **Exodus**, which relates the story of Israel's servitude and its redemption, the giving of the Torah and the laws, the making of the tabernacle, [its] utensils and [the priestly] garments. (**III**) **Leviticus**, also referred to as the Priestly Law,[3] which includes matters related to the sacrifices, priestly sanctity, impurities and purities, and other sanctities relating to the people and the land, namely the laws of the Sabbatical year and the Jubilee. (**IV**) **Numbers**, also called the Book of the Censuses,[4] for it begins with the counting of the Israelites; it likewise relates the dispatching of the spies and the resulting defiance in this matter. [The book] includes *the commandments and laws that the Lord commanded through Moses on the steppes of Moab* (Num. 36:13). (**V**) **Deuteronomy**, also referred to as the Repetition of the Law,[5] in which Moses reviewed [the law] at the end of forty years in order to teach the Israelites their God's Torah. He added commandments and details that he had not yet stated, [as well as] promises and assurances if they would obey [the Torah], and warnings and reproaches if they would not heed Him, *to walk in His ways* (Deut. 26:17). He *called heaven and earth to witness against them* (Deut. 31:28) and wrote a poem for them to bear witness to this,[6] and blessed them before his death.[7] Some Sages enumerated seven [Mosaic]

1. The title is based on a phrase in Ps. 119:105.
2. *maʿaseh bereʾshit*, using the rabbinic reference to Genesis 1.
3. *torat ḳohanim*; the alternative name was of Tannaitic provenance.
4. *ḥumash ha-pequdim*; although less common, this designation also originated in Tannaitic literature.
5. *mishneh torah*; this was a common rabbinic designation, apparently of Amoraitic origin.
6. See Deut. 31:19; the poem is Deut. 32:1–43.
7. See Deut. 33:1–29.

books °(Shab. 117a), for in their view the section beginning *and when the Ark was to set out* . . . (Num. 10:35–36) is a book unto itself;[8] that is, everything that precedes [this section of the book of Numbers] is a book unto itself, and likewise, everything that comes after it is also a discrete book, such that Numbers is divided into three books.

Moses wrote the entire Pentateuch from *In the beginning* (Gen. 1:1) to *before all Israel* (Deut. 34:12), including the last eight verses from *Moses . . . died* (Deut. 34:5) to the end of that book. [Although] R. Judah was of the opinion that Joshua wrote [these final verses],[9] R. Simeon responded to him and said:

> Is it possible that the Torah was missing [even] a single letter, when [Moses] instructed [the Levites] to *Take this book of teaching* [. . . *as a witness against you*] °(Deut. 31:26)?[10] Rather, until this point [i.e., Deut. 34:4] God spoke [the words] and Moses repeated them and wrote; from this point onward, God spoke [the words] and Moses wrote with tears, as [Scripture] later states °(Jer. 36:18):[11] *Baruch answered them:* [Jeremiah] *himself recited all those words to me, and I would write them down in the scroll in ink* °(B.B.15[a], Men. 30[a]).

There are [other Talmudic] texts that have a [different] version [of this passage]:[12] ". . . God spoke and Moses wrote;[13] from this point onward, God spoke and Moses wrote with tears." [With regard to this version,] R. Yom Tov ben Abraham Ishbili wrote:[14]

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8. This rabbinic notion was prompted by the fact that in masoretic Bibles, Numbers 10:35–36 is set off from the rest of the text by two enlarged and inverted Hebrew letters. The Talmudic passage read: "The Sages taught [in a *baraita*]: *And when the Ark was to set out, Moses said* . . . God placed signs before and after this section [of Scripture] to indicate that this is not its proper place. Rabbi [Judah the Prince] said: It is not for this reason [that the signs appear], but because this section is an important book unto itself." The Talmud then went on to identify Rabbi Judah's source as the biblical verse *wisdom . . . has hewn her seven pillars* (Prov. 9:1), indicating that the Pentateuch is comprised of seven books.

9. B.B. 15a, which cites a Tannaitic *baraita*: "*And Moses the servant of the Lord died there*. Is it possible that Moses died and wrote *Moses died . . . there*? Rather, Moses wrote until this point, and Joshua wrote from this point onward. This is the view of R. Judah." The *baraita* continues with the opinion of R. Simeon.

10. Mendelssohn edited the text ever so slightly in order to render R. Simeon's point more clearly: that Moses would not have handed the Levites a text of the Torah as a witness to the covenantal relationship if it were still incomplete. He cited the same Talmudic line, unedited, in his discussion below, p. 244.

11. This chapter of Jeremiah recounted that the prophet had dictated a message to Baruch containing God's call to repentance, asking that it be read aloud in public. Baruch was subsequently questioned as to how he came to record those words, to which he answered in the verse cited here.

12. Mendelssohn's source for this variant and for the discussion that follows is a passage from Ritva cited in Ibn Habib's *Ha-Kotev* to B.B. 15a; see below. *Ha-Kotev* was published in some editions of Habib's *ʿEn Yaʿaqov*.

13. Omitting the word *amar* (rendered in the translation above as "repeated").

14. See n. 12.

> The difference between them[15] is that the earlier verses were written with ink, while these were written with tears; and so it is in the writings of R. Meir.[16] Other texts[17] have the version [that reads]: ". . . Until this point [i.e., Deut. 34:4] God spoke and Moses repeated and wrote"—that is, Moses would repeat each verse before writing it down out of deep affection, lest he err in [transcribing] it. "From this point onward, God spoke and Moses wrote with tears"—that is, he wrote and cried, and did not repeat the verse. And that which is said, "as it is written later [in Scripture], [Jeremiah] *himself recited all those words to me, and I would write them down in the scroll*"—because of his grief Moses did not speak [the words] and write. The first interpretation[18] is [also] supported by the verse [from Jeremiah], which states that God spoke and Moses wrote with ink [emphasis added; E.B], since [otherwise the verse would have] mentioned [the ink] for no apparent reason.

In [his commentary on] the tractate *Menaḥot*, Rashi explained [this passage] according to the second interpretation,[19] but in [his commentary] on *Bava Batra* he explained it according to the first interpretation. He wrote: "As [Scripture] later states [in Jeremiah]:[20] this [Scriptural prooftext] refers to all the words [of the Torah]; when [the Talmud] says that 'God spoke and Moses wrote,' this is the same as what we find [elsewhere], that the prophets recorded the words from the mouths of their masters." These are [Rashi's] words; but [as an interpretation] it too is forced, since the point needs no prooftext.[21]

However, it appears to me that they had compelling reason for citing the words of Baruch as proof, for one might ask: if God spoke and Moses wrote the entire Torah, how could Scripture write about them in the third person and not in the first? For example, everywhere Scripture has *And the Eternal spoke to Moses*, it would have been more fitting to say "I, the Eternal, spoke with Moses," or "And the Eternal spoke to me," depending on whether it was from the perspective of the speaker in the first person, or that of the writer. Why did they shift from the normal language to speak in the third person [and as if] addressing a third person?

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15. That is, between the verses up until Deut. 34:5 and the remaining eight verses of Deuteronomy.

16. The reference is to the twelfth-century Spanish scholar R. Meir Abulafia ha-Levi and his commentary to the Talmud; see *Yad Ramah* to B.B. 15a.

17. This is the version of the Talmud that Mendelssohn originally cited above.

18. This refers to the reading wherein Moses wrote the last eight verses with tears rather than with ink.

19. I.e., that until Deut. 34:5 Moses repeated all the verses out loud, but recorded the last eight verses in silence.

20. These words were the Talmudic lemma with which Rashi began.

21. Mendelssohn was trying to make sense of the prooftext from Jeremiah in light of the two versions of the Talmudic passage. His point was that the prooftext must have been adduced to teach something more than that the prophets faithfully recorded the words of their masters, since this point was self-evident.

It is known that others have already found this question so problematic that it almost brought them to doubt the authorship of the Torah.[22] For this reason, [the Talmud] cites the prooftext about Baruch, who testified that he wrote the book from the dictation of Jeremiah and nonetheless always spoke about himself and Jeremiah in the third person; that is, he read the book to the people with language like *Jeremiah commanded Baruch saying* (Jer. 36:5) rather than "I Jeremiah command Baruch" or "And Jeremiah commanded me." [That prooftext] proves that this was the way that prophets wrote from the mouths of their masters. [Furthermore,] in the beginning of [his commentary on] the Torah, Ramban explained the reason that Moses did not write the Torah in the first person and did not mention himself in the Torah until his birth, [and even then] referred to himself as though someone else was speaking about him. "This was because the Torah preceded the creation of the world,[23] and it goes without saying, the birth of Moses our master. This is akin to the tradition that [the Torah] was written with [letters of] black fire on [a background of] white fire.[24] As such, Moses was similar to a scribe who copies from an ancient book and writes."[25] See the reference cited.

It is thus true and evident that Moses transcribed the entire Torah, from the beginning of the book of Genesis until *before all Israel*, from the dictation of the Almighty. It was for this reason that Scripture said *When Moses had completely written the words of this teaching in a book, until their end* [*ʿad tumam*] °(Deut. 31:24),[26] for the words *their end* indicate the absolute completion [of the book] in all its parts; that is, he finished writing the poems of *Haʾazinu*[27] and *ha-Berakhah*[28] and what followed, down to [the final words] *before all Israel* as we will explain there with God's help. This is the proof adduced by R. Simeon, [when he asked] "is it possible that the Torah was missing [even] one letter, with Scripture saying *Take this book of teaching* (Deut. 31:26)?" For if Moses' scroll was lacking [the last] eight verses, how could he have given it to the Priests from

22. Among others, Mendelssohn was almost certainly thinking here of Baruch Spinoza's *Tractatus Theologico-Politicus*, ch. 8, where Spinoza interpreted Ibn Ezra's esoteric comments on Deut. 1:2 and the latter's reference to Deut. 31:9 ("and Moses wrote") as a veiled allusion to the problem of third-person descriptions. Spinoza utilized this argument alongside other critical observations as a means of questioning the Mosaic authorship of the Pentateuch. The problem of third-person references in Mosaic narratives was also noted by some thirteenth- and fourteenth-century Jewish supercommentaries on Ibn Ezra, although it is not clear if Mendelssohn (or Spinoza, for that matter) was familiar with them.

23. For various formulations of this notion, see, e.g., A.R. 31:1, Sifre to Deut. 7:12 § 37, Shab. 88b, Pes. 54a, and Gen. R. 1:4.

24. Cf. slight variations of this rabbinic statement in P. Sheq. 6:1, and Song. R. to 5:11.

25. That is, like a scribe who copies what is dictated or set before him. With his citation of Ramban, Mendelssohn tacitly demonstrated that critical questions regarding the language of Scripture and the authorship of Moses had already been raised—and to his mind, satisfactorily answered—in medieval Jewish literature.

26. In Mendelssohn's translation: *Bis zu ihrem Ende*.

27. Deut. 32:1–43.

28. Deut. 33:1–29.

the tribe of Levi to place in the ark,[29] without first giving it to Joshua to complete it by adding the story of his death? Rather, it is certain that Moses wrote everything, and did not place a Torah scroll missing a single letter *on the side of the Ark of the Covenant of the Eternal* (Deut. 31:26).

And so we, the entire congregation of Israel, believe that the Torah we have in our possession today is the same one that Moses wrote. Nothing has been changed in it from then until now, and what befell ordinary books did not happen to [the Torah]; for over time, scribes and copyists would modify [books] with additions, deletions, or substitutions—sometimes accidentally due to carelessness, at other times intentionally, in their desire to correct the words of the author—until, with the passage of time, the true reading has been entirely lost and the book altered. But the *God trustworthy in His covenant* (Deut. 7:9) assured us otherwise, as Scripture states *it will not be forgotten from His descendants* °(Deut. 31:21), and this was repeated by His holy prophets when they said *And this shall be my covenant with them, said the Eternal: My spirit which is upon you, and the words which I have placed in your mouth, shall not be absent from your mouth, nor from the mouth of your children, nor from the mouth of your children's children, said the Eternal, from now on, for all time* °(Isa. 59:21). He therefore established for us, at appropriate times, scribes and those expert in the *masorah* who counted all the letters of the Torah in order to safeguard them from additions or deletions;[30] they scrutinized the copied texts to remove any errors in the transcription in accordance with the directives received from the time of Ezra the Scribe and his supporters, as we shall explain below. They were also attentive to the vocalization and cantillation, arranging them properly and safeguarding them from any difficulties. And if there appeared a small discrepancy between the texts with such matters,[31] as for example a discrepancy between the readings of ben Asher and ben Naftali[32] and the like—this happened in only a few instances and did not affect the intended meaning whether you read it one way or the other. The meaning remained the same, and the difference was limited to the markings and the euphony of the reading—not the meaning they yielded. Along these same lines, the Sages said with regard to the letters *mem*, *nun*, *ṣadi*, *peh*, *kaf* that "they had forgotten them and [the seers = the prophets] went and reinstituted them";[33] since there is no difference between the [closed] and open letters except

29. Although v. 26 stated that the Torah scroll was to be placed *on the side of the Ark of the Covenant*, Mendelssohn followed Ramban and the rabbinic position of R. Meir (B.B. 14a) that the scroll was to be placed *inside* the Ark beside the stone tablets containing the Decalogue.

30. Mendelssohn drew on the rabbinic statement, "they were referred to as scribes [*soferim*] because they would count [*soferim*] all the letters of the Torah"; see Tan. *Be-Shallaḥ* [§ 16].

31. I.e., the vocal points and cantillation.

32. These were the two leading masoretes.

33. Shab. 104a. In the script utilized in Torah scrolls, these letters appeared in two different forms determined by their position within a word: the regular or "open letters," and those that came at the end of a word and were referred to as "closed letters." Mendelssohn cited this passage

for the regulation of the script, it was possible that they were forgotten and that the seers were needed to reinstate them through prophecy.

Regarding this matter it is appropriate to note that there are four distinct aspects [to language], namely: (1) the sound uttered, or vocal intonations that emanate from the mouth of the speaker to the ear of the listener, by means of which the listener understands what is in the speaker's mind; (2) the articulation[34] of the sound uttered, being the combination of those vocal intonations, joining and separating them such that they form different words and phrases; [and] the formation of syllables and sounds, and their relation and measure; (3) the script, being the markings and signs by means of which the uttered sounds are made known to those who see them, like the consonants and vowels; (4) the articulation of the script, being the signs pertaining to the articulation of the sound uttered as mentioned above, this being the combination and separation of letters and words by means of spaces, diacritical marks, and punctuation. In Hebrew, even the vowels are noted by means of diacritical marks beneath the script, and as such, the vowels too are part of the articulation of the writing. We will discuss each of these distinct aspects in detail.

[(1)] Hebrew, in which the twenty-four books [of Scripture] in our possession were written, was the language in which God spoke to Adam, Cain, Noah, and the holy patriarchs. It was in that language that He proclaimed the Decalogue at Mount Sinai and in which the tablets were written, and He spoke with Moses and His prophets in that language. This alone suffices [to establish its] advantage, superiority, and glory over all other languages so as to confer upon it the name "sacred tongue."

In Genesis Rabbah °(chapter 31, section 8) [we read]:[35]

> *Fashion a saraf* (Num. 21:8) was not explained [in the Torah]. R. Yudan says in the name of R. Issi: Scripture says *Let the wise man hear and enhance learning* (Prov. 1:5)—this refers to Moses, since God said *fashion a saraf* but did not explain. He [= Moses] thought: if I make it out of gold, the word [*zahav*] would not correspond to the word [for serpent (*naḥash*)];[36] if from silver, the word [*kesef*] would [also]

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in order to highlight the rabbinic view that such orthographical variation did not affect the meaning of Scripture and never undermined the traditional confidence in the integrity of the biblical text.

34. *tiqqun*, used here in the sense of normative regulation and conventional arrangement.

35. The midrashic context of this citation was a discourse on the biblical imperative *ʿaseh lekha* (here translated as "fashion [a] . . . ") and began as follows: "R. Issi said: [the Bible] employs *ʿaseh lekha* in four instances: in three [instances] it [= the material from which the object is fashioned] is explained, and in one it is not . . . ." Mendelssohn cited only the case in which the Bible did not specify the material.

36. *en ha-lashon ha-zeh nofel ʿal lashon ha-zeh*. The phrase *lashon nofel ʿal lashon* generally connotes word play and alliteration, or more broadly, some form of literary consonance. In this rabbinic passage, Moses understood that the object he was to fashion was to represent a serpent (as is evident in the verse that follows) and that the answer to the question "from what shall the *seraf* be

not correspond to that word. However, if I make it from copper the language corresponds, since the [following] verse says *And Moses made a copper serpent* [*neḥash neḥoshet*] (Num. 21:9). From here we know that the Torah was given in Hebrew.

R. Phinehas and R. Hezekiah said in the name of R. Simon: just as the Torah was given in Hebrew, so too the world was created by means of Hebrew. Have you ever heard anyone say: *gyne—gyneia* °(*ita—iteta*; such was the version in the *ʿArukh*, s.v. *anthrope*); *anthrope*[37]*—anthropeia*; *gavra—gavreta*?[38] But [the Bible has] *ish* and *ishah*, in which the word [for woman] corresponds to the word [for man].[39]

°(This is also cited in [Genesis Rabbah] chapter 18, section 7; see *Yefeh To'ar* there.)[40]

This is the explanation [of the midrashic passage]:[41] "From here we know that the Torah was given in Hebrew"—that is, that God spoke with Moses in Hebrew—because the alliteration [only] works in Hebrew, and Moses understood on his own that God intended for him to make a copper serpent. And since there were those who said that the script changed from *ashuri* to Hebrew,[42] as we will explain below, it was possible to err like those who mistakenly assert that the language also changed and that the Torah was given in another language; as such, the midrash cited proof that it was in Hebrew [that the Torah was given]. R. Simon added that "the world was created by means of Hebrew," which is to say that this was the language of mankind from the beginning of creation. It was the language that God taught Adam and his wife, and it was the language in which they and their descendants spoke. He cited as proof from what Adam said, *this one shall be called woman* [*ishah*] *for from man* [*ish*] *she was taken* (Gen. 2:23), since only the Hebrew words for man and woman are similar in sound, while in Greek the words for man, *anthropos*, and for woman, *gyne*, are not derived from each another. Similarly, in Aramaic, the word for man is

made?" would be indicated by some literary consonance. This is made explicit in Mendelssohn's explanation that follows.

37. The midrash used the artificial form *anthrope*, and Mendelssohn cited it accordingly.

38. The point was that in Greek and Aramaic the words for woman (*gyne*, *iteta*) and man (*anthropos*, *gavra*) were not morphologically connected, which is to say that the pairing evident in the Hebrew (*ish—ishah*) did not exist in those ancient languages and thus Gen. 2:23 made sense only in Hebrew.

39. This midrash featured directly and indirectly in medieval and early modern discussions of the primacy of Hebrew that informed Mendelssohn's discussion. See, e.g., *Kuzari*, II:68, and especially the sixteenth-century commentary of Judah Moscato, *Qol Yehudah*, on that passage; and *Me'or ʿEnayim*, ch. 57, 172b.

40. *Yefeh To'ar* was a sixteenth-century commentary to *Midrash Rabbah* by Samuel Jaffe b. Isaac Ashkenazi of Constantinople, published in Fürth, 1692). In modern editions, the passage cited corresponds to Gen. R. 18 (4).

41. A good deal of the material in the following two paragraphs was drawn from the extended discussion of *Yefeh To'ar* cited above.

42. That is, from an ancient script to the one commonly identified as Hebrew.

gavra and for woman, *iteta*; it is thus evident that Adam spoke neither Greek nor Aramaic.

There was no need to elicit proof with regard to other languages, for if anyone errs [by saying that the Torah was given in another language,] it could only be with regard to those languages that are ancient and excellent and used by well-ordered nations and people [mindful] of norms and laws from ancient times. In truth, the status of Aramaic is almost equal to that of Hebrew since the Torah occasionally uses that language, and [we find] in tractate Sanhedrin °(38b): "R. Judah said in the name of Rav: Adam spoke in Aramaic, as it is written *how precious* [*yaqeru*] *to me are thoughts that include you, God* (Ps. 139:17)."[43] The meaning [of that Talmudic passage] was that Adam also spoke Aramaic, for R. Judah was [surely] not unaware of the fact that in Aramaic the word for man did not correspond to the word for woman. The Greek language was also esteemed by the Sages, as it appears in tractate Megillah °(9b) with regard to the verse *May God expand Yafet* (Gen. 9:27); see the reference cited. This, however, was not the case with all other languages, with regard to which one would not have any doubt or make any mistake. As such, there are no grounds for the possibility raised by R. Isaac Arama in the eighth chapter of his book *ʿAqedat Yiṣḥaq*,[44] in the section on attraction between things, who, in response to the proofs cited by R. Simon, asked: perhaps *ish* and *ishah* were translated from another language, seeing that they are translatable nouns and not proper names that are untranslatable?[45] [There is no basis for this question] for according to what we have explained, R. Simon only negated the possibility that those words were translated from Greek and Aramaic, which is why he pointed out that the words do not correspond in those languages; and if, perhaps, there is a language anywhere in the world wherein the words for woman and man are also similar in sound, we need not concern ourselves with it for, as we have said, it was only with regard to those [two] languages that there were grounds to err.[46]

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43. This rabbinic passage took as its starting point that Ps. 139:13ff addressed itself to God as man's creator, and that the first-person voice was that of Adam. Less clear was how v. 17 attested to Adam's knowledge of Aramaic. One possibility suggested by earlier scholars was that the word *yaqeru* [precious] was of Aramaic provenance. One medieval Talmud commentary, R. Meir Abulafia's *Yad Ramah*, loc. cit., cited Ezra 4:10, *the great and honored* [*yaqira*] *Osnappar* in support of this reading, although this text was published only after Mendelssohn's demise.

44. R. Issac Arama (d. 1494) was a Spanish scholar who spent the last post-expulsion years of his life in Naples. *ʿAqedat Yiṣḥaq* was a philosophical-homiletical commentary to the Pentateuch.

45. Arama's objection was also cited in *Yefeh Toʾar* and *Meʾor ʿEnayim*.

46. Mendelssohn's point was that the linguistic correspondence of *ish—ishah* was not necessarily unique to Hebrew and might well exist in other languages (such as English, a language he read). The argument was that since the literary convergence evident in Hebrew was not attested in the other major languages of the ancient world, the Torah could not have been originally received or transmitted in those languages. He could thus assert that Hebrew must have been the original language in which the Torah was recorded.

Truly, the proof garnered by individual proper names included in the Torah is compelling and incontrovertible, since such names are not generally translated but left in their original form.[47] [Similarly, the names] Homer, Plato, Alexander, Caesar, and Cicero [are rendered] without alteration in all languages, with only slight variation in pronunciation between nations. We see that the Torah offered a reason for the designation of proper names: Adam from *adamah* °(it is called *adamah* [earth] due to its [red] color, for travelers said that the earth in that climate was red [*adom*]);[48] Eve [*ḥavah*] from *mother of all the living* [*ḥai*] (Gen. 3:20).[49] Likewise Cain, Seth, Abel, Noah, and Peleg—the reasons for their names are explained in a way that is only possible in Hebrew, in which the words for them correspond. All the languages into which the biblical narratives were translated retained the actual Hebrew names of Adam, Cain, Eve, and the like, but in those languages the reasons given for the names are not discernible from the language alone. This is powerful proof and certain evidence of their original designation in Hebrew.

Now, the whole world *had the same language and the same expressions* (Gen. 11:1)[50] until the days of Peleg *in whose days the earth was divided* (Gen. 10:25), when, with the sin of the generation of the dispersion, the clans moved away from each other, from one end of the world to the other. The languages became confused, as Scripture says: *there the Eternal confused the language of the whole earth, and from there the Eternal scattered them over the surface of the whole earth* °(Gen. 11:9). On account of that confusion and intermixing, language changed and diverged for *every nation in its own language* (Esth. 1:22). Some languages retained a certain similarity with that primeval language from which they emerged, while others grew distant with the length of time and the migrations of nations, so that there is no longer any recognizable similarity in sound. Those languages multiplied, and the Sages classified them into seventy languages according to what they took to be the number of the descendants of Shem, Ham, and Japhet at that time.[51] And thus they were enumerated individually in *Pe-*

47. This argument was broadly advanced in Moscato's *Qol Yehudah* to *Kuzari* II:68.

48. See Gen. 2:7. This example has no rabbinic source but appeared in medieval texts such as *Kuzari* II:68, Ibn Ezra's introduction to *Safah Berurah*, and *Me'or ʿEnayim*, ch. 57, 172b. The remainder of this paragraph was also informed by these sources.

49. In this last instance, the *vav* was substituted for the *yud*, as one finds elsewhere in biblical Hebrew.

50. Mendelssohn had translated *devarim aḥadim* as *einerlei Redensarten*.

51. The two sentences that follow were taken (with a few ellipses) from *Me'or ʿEnayim*, 173a, including the misattribution of the rabbinic source. The midrashic passage did not appear in any known version of *Pesiqta de-Rav Kahana* but in *Leqaḥ Ṭov* to Gen. 9:19. (This latter collection was sometimes referred to as *Pesiqta Zuṭarta*; hence the frequent confusion among early modern scholars.) The issue regarding the names of *Pelishtim* and *Ashur*, which appear in Gen. 10:11 and 14 amid the genealogy of Noah's descendants, was whether they were names of individuals or of places. Mendelssohn followed Ramban in taking the latter view (see Ramban to Gen. 10:11, 14), thereby arriving at the number seventy.

siqta de-Rav Kahana: Japhet had fourteen [descendants], Ham had thirty, and Shem had twenty-six. [This midrash] omitted the names of *Pelishtim* and *Ashur* from among Ham's descendants, for these two were not to be included with the others who were already enumerated. That holy language [= Hebrew] retained its splendor, its refinement, and its pleasing quality only in the hands of Eber, [his son] Peleg, and his descendants. They maintained the command that God directed to Adam and his wife in that language, which the Sages identified with the seven precepts [*miṣvot*] commanded to the descendants of Noah;[52] and there is no doubt that Adam and Eve, who heard those precepts from the mouth of the Almighty in Hebrew, transmitted them to their children in that language, and their children to theirs. Likewise, it appears that the Genesis narratives were made known to Adam and Eve from the mouth of God and transmitted orally, generation after generation, until Eber, as I noted in my commentary on Genesis °(2:1);[53] this too was in Hebrew. As such, Hebrew is called *leshon ʿivri* from the name Eber [*ʿever*], as some scholars suggest[54] °([others like] Rashi and R. Obadiah of Bertinoro opine that *ʿivri* means "from across the river"),[55] for at the time of the dispersion Eber was the only one who retained the language in its proper form, and from him it was passed to his descendants until it reached Abraham our patriarch and his household, and then Isaac and Jacob and their households. [The Hebrew language] was taken with them to Egypt, and even there they did not change their sanctified tongue, as our Sages stated,[56] and this was to their merit.[57] There is reliable proof for all this from the proper names mentioned in the Torah generation after generation, all of them derived from Hebrew,[58] as for example *avraham* from *av hamon*[59] and *yishmaʿel* from *shamaʿ el*;[60] and likewise Isaac and Jacob and his children, the *tribes of God* (Ps. 122:4)—all these [are instances] where the language corresponds in Hebrew. And the daughters of Lot, who grew up in Abraham's home, called their children *moʾav* and *ben ʿami* because they were begotten from their father.[61] The names of the

52. Mendelssohn was referring to a rabbinic statement in San. 56b, wherein R. Yohanan and other Sages derived what they referred to as the seven Noahide laws from God's singular command to Adam in Gen. 2:16: "The Eternal God commanded the man saying, 'Of every tree of the garden you are free to eat.'"

53. The comment actually appears in the *Beʾur* to Gen. 2:4.

54. See *Kuzari* II:68 and the commentaries *Qol Yehudah* and *Oṣar Neḥmad*, loc. cit.

55. See Rashi to Gen. 14:13 (although cf. Rashi to Gen. 39:14); and R. Obadiah of Bertinoro to M. Yad. 4:5. See also Ibn Ezra to Ex. 21:2; and *Oṣar Neḥmad* to *Kuzari* I:95, s.v. *ʿal ken niqraʿ ivri*.

56. See, e.g., Mekh. *Bo*, section 5, and Lev. R. 32:5. Mendelssohn cited the same rabbinic statement in *Qohelet Musar*, section 2; see p. 29 above.

57. Echoing Gen. 15:6.

58. *nigzeru mi-maḥṣab leshon ʿever*; a more literary translation might render this "mined from the quarry of the Hebrew tongue."

59. Gen. 17:5.

60. Gen. 16:11.

61. Gen. 19:36–38.

wells and the place-names—such as *beʾer la-ḥai-roʾi*,[62] *beʾer sheva*ʿ,[63] *ʿeseq* and *siṭnah*,[64] *ṣoʿar*,[65] *miṣpah*,[66] *sukḳot*,[67] *beit el*,[68] *avel miṣrayim*,[69] and the like—all these names indicate that their source was the Hebrew language in which the word is understood from its subject. But with regard to the languages into which the Torah is translated, the proper names remain as they are in Hebrew, while their meaning—such as the reason for being called by that name—are changed by the translation, and so the similarity in sound is lost and the names no longer correspond to their meanings. For example, [*Leah conceived and bore a son*] *and named him reʾuven*, *for she said "the Eternal has seen* [*raʾah*] *my affliction"* (Gen. 29:32) was translated [into Aramaic] by Onqelos: "for she said 'my humiliation was revealed [*geli*] before God'"; and likewise [the name] Levi, from *my husband will join himself* [*yillaveh*] *to me* (Gen. 29:34) is translated [by Onqelos] "my husband will become attached [*yiṯḥaber*] to me"; [*and Moses made*] *a copper serpent* [*neḥash neḥoshet*] (Num. 21:9) is translated [in Aramaic] "a copper serpent [*ḥivya di-neḥasha*]" and in German *ḳupferne Schlange*. This is the case in all instances where the words correspond [in the Torah]. And thus, if the prophet says *And he hoped for justice* [*mishpaṭ*], *and behold injustice* [*mispaḥ*]; *for equity* [*liṣedaqah*], *but behold iniquity* [*ṣeʿaqah*] °(Isa. 5:7) the Aramaic translation has "I thought that they would perform judgment [*dina*], and behold they are oppressors [*anusin*]; that they would act meritoriously [*de-yaʿabdun zaḳhu*], and behold they multiply transgressions [*masgan ḥovin*]."[70]

[(2)] No intelligent person should doubt that when God spoke with humans, He made His voice heard with all the articulation that one would utilize appropriate to that utterance, namely, the enunciation of the consonants by means of vowels,[71] their combination and differentiation according to the meaning, the modulation of the voices with high and low [pitch], with long and brief [sounds], and with appropriate euphonic pauses. Without these, an utterance cannot be adequately understood. For example, when God said to Cain, *what have you done? The voice of your brother's blood cries out to Me from the ground. Henceforth* . . . etc. °(Gen. 4:10[–11]), there is no doubt that the voice Cain heard

62. Gen. 16:13–14.
63. Gen. 26:33.
64. Gen. 26:20–21.
65. Gen. 19:22.
66. Gen. 31:49.
67. Gen. 33:17.
68. Gen. 28:19.
69. Gen. 50:11.
70. The example demonstrated that the poetic assonance of the original was unavailable in its Aramaic translation, and provided Mendelssohn with further evidence of Hebrew as the original language of Scripture.
71. *havarat ha-ʾotiyyot ʿal yede ha-tenuʿot*; in more technical terms this refers to syllabification.

intoned those sounds in accordance with the conventions of the language; [God must have] joined the consonants and the appropriate vowels to form words, and combined the words and paused between them in keeping with the meaning. So for example, He joined the word *what* with the word *have-you-done* [*ʿasita*] and paused with a rise of [His] voice at the word *ʿasita* as one does when asking a question. There was a more significant pause at the word *ground* for at that point He concluded with the cause and began to speak of the consequence, *henceforth you are accursed; be off from the ground*, etc. And with the phrase *the voice of your brother's blood*,[72] etc., He would linger slightly at the word *your brother*, since that point [marked off] the agent and the beginning of the action *cries out to Me*; and the word *from*, which is a preposition and also comparatively shorter than the word *ground* that follows it, was sounded quickly without any pause, although there was a slight pause with the word *to Me*, since that concluded the action; and what followed it only tells of the place from which that action came, [namely] *from the ground*. All these things are known and commonly recognized by masters of language, and the principles governing the placement of the cantillation and their melodic intonation[73] were partly constructed and based upon them. In this, [Biblical] Hebrew is unique among other languages known to us; none of those [other] languages have as much precision in aligning the conjunction and disjunction of words with the connection and differentiation of ideas, such that the ways of the language correspond in this sense with the ways of the mind and its thoughts, and external speech is perfectly arranged and aligned with internal speech.[74] We shall speak about this more below.

Know, however, that the connection and differentiation of the words denoted by the cantillation marks are in themselves insufficient, for if the words are said with careful attention to their tempo [but] without appropriately changing or altering the modulation and quality of their sounds and their pleasing cadence as appropriate to the content, they will be like *dry bones which have no life* (Ez. 37:4–5). One would hardly comprehend what the speaker is thinking, and [even] if he were understood, his palate would yield no pleasure, like *something tasteless with no salt* (Job 6:6); [his words] would not enter the listener's mind to rouse and instruct him, with the result that the Sages stated, "one who reads [the Torah] without melody, etc."[75] For each

72. This might be rendered *the voice of the blood of your brother*, allowing for the pause on the last word of the subject clause.

73. *hanaḥat ha-ṭeʿamim u-neginatan*.

74. On internal and external speech, see Mendelssohn's discussion in his introduction to *Beʾur Millot ha-Higgayon*, pp. 66–70 above.

75. Mendelssohn truncated a rabbinic statement that appeared in Meg. 32a and elsewhere: "One who reads without a pleasant melody [*neʿimah*] and recites without a singing tune [*zimrah*],

and every thought has its own intonation and inflection in sound according to the way it is to function in the mind: one kind of inflection for a question, another for astonishment, and so too for love and hate, anger and favor, forewarning and vengeance, and sadness and joy. For example, the words *where is your brother Abel* (Gen. 4:9) is a simple question, without any feeling, while the question *what have you done*? (v. 10) has the sense of bewilderment and of warning a sinner. The statement *the voice of your brother's blood*, etc., contains pity for innocent blood spilled, and zeal for vengeance against the one who spilled it; and He concluded with words of reproof, contempt, and chastisement, *henceforth you are accursed; be off from the ground*, etc. (v. 11). Even though these connotations do not have written signs and notations, one who wishes to give sense to his words needs to vary and alter the intonation in keeping with the meaning that the words yield, and in accordance with the relationship between sentiments and the modulation of the sounds and inflection.

As such, there is no doubt that Moses heard the entire Torah from the mouth of the Almighty with all the magnificence and articulation of the vocalization and the cantillation assigned to its words, [in all] their details and variations, absent nothing. This was how he transmitted them to Joshua, and Joshua to the elders, and how the tradition was passed along generation after generation. The son who learned from his father or the pupil from the teacher heard the phrases [of the Torah] with all their appropriate articulation, just as [his father or teacher] received them from his father or teacher; and just as he instructed his children and pupils, for such is the [rabbinic understanding of] the commandment *impress them upon your children* (Deut. 6:7)—"that the words should be articulate in their mouths."[76] They did not pass on Holy Scripture to their children or pupils and leave them to read the written text alone, for they were *like the words of a sealed book* (Isa. 29:11). Rather, they read [the Torah] in front of them and recited them through the *sound of the words* (Deut. 4:12), with melody and tune, and by these means they transmitted the cantillation. They sweetened its words for their [children] so that the [words] penetrated their hearts *like goads and implanted nails* (Ecc. 12:11).

[(3)] On the matter of the script in which Moses wrote his [copy of the] Torah, there is a dispute among recent writers as to whether or not it was [written us-

regarding him the Torah says *I also gave them laws that were not good*, etc." (Ez. 20:25). Scholars have generally interpreted the first clause as referring to chanting the Torah with the cantillation, and the second to the recitation of the Mishnah in a sing-song fashion.

76. Qidd. 30a.

ing] the script that we have in our possession today.[77] The essence of the dispute rests on what appears in the second chapter of Sanhedrin °(21b [–22a]):[78]

> Mar Zutra—and some say it was Mar Uqba—said: the Torah was originally given to Israel in *ketav ʿivri* and in the Hebrew language; in the days of Ezra, it was given to them again in *ketav ashurit* and in Aramaic. The Israelites selected *ketav ashurit* and Hebrew, and left for the commoners [*hedyoṭot*] the *ketav ʿivri* and Aramaic. Who were the common people? Rav Hisda said: the *Kutim*.[79] What is *ketav ʿivri*? Rav Hisda said: *libonaʾah* script.

°(Rashi explained: "*ketavʿivri*—those used across [*ʿever*] the river; *libonaʾah* script—large letters, like those used in amulets and *mezuzot*." Rabbenu Tam[80] explained that *libonaʾah* "was the name of a place . . . [where] they wrote with different script." This [latter view] appears to be correct, since the large letters [suggested by Rashi] are not sufficiently different from the smaller ones that one familiar with one could not read the other, as when it was written *they could not read the writing* °(Dan. 5:8). Furthermore, it is today known that the *Kutim* are inhabitants of Samaria who have a script different from *ketav ashurit*, as I will mention below. And this is what Maimonides wrote in his commentary on Mishnah Yadayim 4:5, that *ketav ʿivri* was the script used by "the nation known as *saʾmirah*," which is Samaria [*shomron*]; this was also the view of R. Obadiah of Bertinoro.)

> It was taught:[81] Rabbi Yose says: Ezra was worthy of having the Torah given to Israel through him, had Moses not preceded him. Regarding Moses [Scripture] states *Moses went up . . . before God* °(Ex. 19:3), [while] with Ezra it states *this Ezra went up from Babylon* °(Ezra 7:6); just as the ascent mentioned earlier [refers to the giving of the] Torah, so the ascent mentioned later [refers to the giving of the] Torah. Regarding Moses [Scripture] states *the Eternal commanded me at that time to teach you other statutes and laws* °(Deut. 4:14); with Ezra it states *for Ezra had dedicated himself to study the teaching of the Eternal so as to observe it, and to teach*

77. The question as to whether Scripture was originally recorded in what was commonly called Hebrew script or with another set of ancient Near Eastern characters garnered a great degree of attention among Christian scholars of the early modern era. The issue was thoroughly discussed in Brian Walton's *Biblia Sacra Polyglotta*, 1, Prolegomena III (esp. § 29–38, pp. 20–23), where he clearly assumed—based partly on the rabbinic text cited here by Mendelssohn—that the Torah was not originally written in Hebrew script. Despite its detractors, Walton's Prolegomena served as an authoritative introduction to questions regarding the biblical text well into the eighteenth century.

78. Note that by shifting the contemporary debate to a discussion of rabbinic sources, Mendelssohn was implicitly undermining the novelty and potential challenge of early modern scholarship.

79. In rabbinic literature, the term *Kutim* came to be synonymous with Samaritans. See below.

80. R. Jacob ben Meir (1100–1171), known as Rabbenu Tam, was a grandson of Rashi and one of the leading Tosafists.

81. After his brief explanation of the Talmudic references, Mendelssohn resumed the citation from San. 21b.

statute and law to Israel °(Ezra 7:10). But even though the Torah was not given by him, the script was changed by him, as it is stated and *the writing of the letter* [*ketav ha-nishtevan*] *was written in Aramaic and translated into Aramaic* °(Ezra 4:7), and it is written *and they could not read the writing, or make known its meaning to the king* °(Dan. 5:8), and it is written *he shall write* [*ve-katav*] *a copy* [*mishneh*] *of the Torah* °(Deut. 17:18)—a script [*ketav*] that is liable to change [*le-hishtanot*].[82] Why was it called *ashurit*? Because it came with them from *ashur* [Assyria].

It was taught: Rabbi [Judah] says: At first the Torah was given to Israel in this script; when they sinned, it was changed to *roʿeṣ*. When they repented, [the original script] was returned to them, as it says *Return to the stronghold you prisoners of hope, even today I will restore to you a double promise* °(Zech. 9:12). Why was it called *ashurit*? Because it is an excellent [*meʾusheret*] script. R. Simeon b. Eleazar says in the name of R. Eliezer b. Perata, who said in the name of R. Eliezer ha-Modai: this script had not changed at all, etc. . . .[83] According to R. Simeon, who said that the script had not changed, what is the meaning of *they could not read the writing* (Dan. 5:8)? Said Rav: it was written in cipher [*gimaṭriya*], etc.

This is what Rashi commented:

[s.v.] "*ketav ha-nishtevan*" (Ezra 4:7)—this means "a changed script [*ketav she-nishtanah*]." This verse appears in the book of Ezra, in whose day they wrote with a different script that was changed by the angel who wrote *mene mene teqel u-farsin* (Dan. 5:25) in the days of Daniel—Aramaic script and Aramaic language. [About this] it was said *and they could not read the writing*—that they could not read the writing that the angel wrote in the days of Belshazzar; and since there were many Jews there,[84] one can learn from this that that script changed for them on that day.

[s.v.] "*a copy* [*mishneh*] *of the Torah*" (Deut. 17:18)—[with these words,] Moses hinted that the script of his day would in the future change from *ʿivri* to *ashurit*, which was given to them in the days of Daniel; and then Ezra came and wrote the Torah in *ketav ashurit*.

[s.v.] "At first the Torah was given to Israel in this script"—[this was] in the days of Moses; and why was it that [later] *they could not read the writing*? Since they sinned during the first Temple period and disparaged the Torah, it became shattered [*roʿeṣ*]—as in [the verse] *shatters* [*tirʿaṣ*] *the foe* (Ex. 15:6)—meaning that they forgot it.

Now, it is exceedingly difficult to fit Rashi's words [to the texts], for when he explained that *ketav ha-nishtevan* meant "the changed script," this must be taken homiletically, since the word *nishtevan* appeared a number of times in the book of Ezra, and in context it meant something like "letter." Thus the king responded [by saying] *the letter* [*nishtevana*] *that you sent to us* (Ezra 4:18),

82. The root of the word *mishneh* (*shin–nun–heh*) connotes "to copy, repeat," but it can also mean "to change."

83. Mendelssohn omitted a handful of lines from the Talmudic discussion.

84. And none, save Daniel, could read the writing.

and the letter that the king sent was referred to as *the letter* [*nishtevana*] *of King Artaxerxes* (Ezra 4:23). And Rashi [himself] wrote [in his commentary on Ezra 4:7] regarding *ketav ha-nishtevan*, etc., that "the text of the letter was written in Aramaic letters and the letter was translated into the Aramaic language." If so, what kind of proof can there be for the script in which Ezra wrote the Torah from the script of a letter written by enemies of Israel to the king? Furthermore, they did not write in *ashurit* but in Aramaic, as it says explicitly [in Ezra 4:7] *written in Aramaic*. And if the script was referred to as "a changed script" and thus appropriately changed—that is, a script into which it was appropriate to change—with what illegible script did the angel write in the days of Belshazzar? And furthermore, [even] with all this, we still do not know: who changed the script? In one instance it is reported that it was changed by an angel, and in another that it was changed by Ezra. One may further wonder about the three scriptural verses cited by R. Yose, the author of this teaching: why did he first cite Ezra, then Daniel, and then the Pentateuch?[85] In the end, I had absolutely no idea how to make sense of the words of the *baraita* [of R. Yose] according to the explanation of Rashi.

It would appear that one should explain the words of the Sages in a different manner. For this writing or letter—about which [Scripture] says *a letter* [*ketav ha-nishtevan*] *written in Aramaic and translated into Aramaic*—contained adversarial words that the *Kutim*, the enemies of Israel, wrote to King Artaxerxes in order to annul the plans of those building the Temple.[86] Scripture [lists the letter writers] there °(Ezra 4:9–10):[87] *Rehum the government official and Shimshai the sofer* °([Rashi] commented: Rehum the secretary, and Shimshai the scribe) *and the rest of their companions* °(the rest of their group); *the Dinaites, the Afarsatchites, the Tarpelites, the Afarsites, the Archevites, the Babylonians, the Shushanchites, the Dehavites, and the Elamites* °(these are all names of nations that Sennacherib settled in the cities of Samaria); *and other nations that the great and glorious Osnappar exiled and settled in the city of Samaria, and the rest beyond the river* °(the Afarsites are the Persians that Sennacherib settled in the cities of Samaria; *the rest beyond the river*—the rest of the nations that are beyond the river, for the river Perat separates the land of Israel and Babylon, such that those nations on the former side are beyond the river for those standing in Babylonia: Rashi). The *Kutim* who authored the letter—referred to [here] as *the people of the land* (Ezra 4:4) and by the Sages as "commoners [*hedyoṭot*]"—adopted the *ketav ʿivri* and Aramaic language, just as Mar Zutra said. This was known at the time of the Sages of the Talmud just as it is [known] at present, as we will mention below. They

85. That is, why are these verses cited in reverse order of their place in the traditional canon?

86. The association of the letter writers with the Samaritans is made in Sifre to Deut. 32:41 § 331.

87. The verse is in Aramaic, presumably the reason Mendelssohn interpolated Rashi's commentary.

wrote the letter in Aramaic, which was their language, and in Aramaic script, which appears to be the *ketav ʿivri* that the *Kutim* had chosen to use. And since Ezra the scribe, who cited the words of the letter in the language in which it was written ◦(Ezra authored his own book, as the Sages said in B.B. 15[a]), mentioned that it was written in Aramaic script and in the Aramaic language, one can infer that this was not the script that he used in writing his own book; for if it was the very same script, why would he mention it and comment upon the script or language in which the letter was written? He would only have had to say that "In the days of Artaxerxes, Bishlam and Mithredath and Tabeel, etc., wrote this" or ". . . as follows," and we would have known that it was just like the letter before us, in its actual script and language. However, if the script of the letter was different from that used in the book of Ezra, then the author did well to mention it, [thereby] informing us that [in the original letter] the script and language were Aramaic, that he would write in that language without changing it, but that he would change the script and use a different one. From this it is proven that the script employed by Ezra in writing his book was not that of the *Kutim* but *ashurit*, as we have in our hands today.

Now, Ezra and his supporters arranged the Aramaic translation of the Torah, as the Sages wrote ◦(Ned. 37b): "R. Hananel said in the name of Rav: what is [the meaning of] the verse *They read from the book, the law of God, explicated; making it intelligible, they understood the reading* ◦(Neh. 8:8)? *They read from the book, the law of God*—this refers to Scripture; *explicated* [*meforash*] refers to the Aramaic translation [*Targum*]." It appears that they had the translation in book [form], since that is the implication of the verse; and since they wrote the books of Ezra and Daniel in Aramaic in *ketav ashurit*, they simply wrote the translation of the Torah in *ketav ashurit* as well. It was for this reason that Mar Zutra said that in the days of Ezra the Torah was given to Israel once again in *ketav ashurit* and in Aramaic, meaning that in his day, and by his hand, the Torah was translated into Aramaic, and that translation was written in *ketav ashurit*.

With regard to [Dan. 5:5–8 and to the inability to read] what the angel wrote for Belshazzar, he must have written in that very same script that the Men of the Great Assembly wrote the book of Daniel ◦(for they wrote Ezekiel, the Twelve Minor Prophets, Daniel, and Esther, as the Sages stated in B.B. 15[a]). That script was *ketav ashurit*, since the writer did not mention that it was in Aramaic as he had in the book of Ezra. Would it not have been even more necessary [in the case of Daniel] to explain what script it was that they could not read? But it certainly must have been in [the same] *ketav ashurit* as it is in the book of Daniel before us, and it was therefore unnecessary to mention either the script or the language, since it was the same as that which was in front of us. At that time, many Jews there could not read that script, as it said *they could not read the writing*. Afterwards, in the days of Ezra, that script became widespread through him, being that he wrote the Torah and the Aramaic translation in *ketav ashurit*.

It is thus proven, with compelling evidence, that the script was changed by this scribe [i.e., Ezra], since in the days of Daniel they did not know how to read *ketav ashurit*, which was the script used [later] by Ezra and his supporters.

From this you will [also] understand why R. Yose first cited the verse from Ezra and afterwards the verse from Daniel, for without the verse from Ezra we learn nothing from the verse in Daniel, since we would not have known which script the angel employed. But once it was mentioned in Ezra that the text was written in Aramaic [script] and translated into Aramaic while with Daniel it said nothing at all, it is evident that the angel wrote[88] in the same script that was used by the Men of the Great Assembly in writing the book of Daniel, namely *ketav ashurit*. And the verse *they could not read the writing* proves that the script was changed after that point. In order to avoid the difficulty one might raise with regard to how Ezra and his supporters were permitted to change the script—after all, does Scripture not say *These are the commandments* (Lev. 27:34), indicating that a prophet is not permitted to introduce anything new from this point onward, including the script, as we have in Megillah °([2b–]3a)?—R. Yose added: "and it is written *he shall write a copy of the Torah*—a script that is liable to change." In other words, [Ezra] found a scriptural verse and expounded it, just as Tosafot answered in response to that very same question,[89] namely, that those great men relied on this *derash* in changing the script. As such, with the help of the blessed God, the words of R. Yose are explained very clearly. It may even be possible to force [this understanding of R. Yose's words] into Rashi's words, and to explain them in a manner that agrees with our explanation here.

R. Joseph Albo, the author of *Sefer ha-ʿIqqarim* °(III:7) understood the words in their straightforward sense, that according to R. Yose and Mar Zutra, Moses wrote his [copy of the] Torah with *ketav ʿivri*, which is the script employed by the *Kutim* and in which the tablets were inscribed, and that in the days of Ezra the script was changed to *ashurit*, which came with them from Babylon °(this is referred to as *Syrisch*). However, Ritva wrote[90] in the name of the Tosafists that not a single Sage doubted that the tablets and Moses' Torah scroll were written with the excellent and sanctified script that we have in our possession. [After all,] how many mounds of laws and hidden meanings are connected to it? And if the tablets were [written] in *ketav ʿivri*, what miracle was there in the suspension of the *mem* and *samekh*? °(In the script used by the *Kutim* the *mem* and *samekh* do not form a full circle.)[91]

88. Reading *katav* instead of *katuv*; this typographical error was corrected in most subsequent editions.

89. Tosafot to Meg. 2b, s.v. *ve-ʿod ha-ʾamar rav ḥisda*.

90. See n. 12 above. Mendelssohn paraphrased the first few sentences of Ritva and then cited him directly after the parenthetical note.

91. The issue here was linked to the rabbinic passage discussed above, Meg. 2b, and a statement of Rav Hisda that "the [letters] *mem* and *samekh* of the tablets stood [in place] by a miracle."

> Rather, there is certainly no doubt that this script called *ashuri* is the same holy script that appeared on the tablets, which is why it is called 'holy' . . . And due to the perfection and holiness of that script, they would not in those days even use it in books that a king or individual would write for his own [private] use; instead, they used *ketav ʿivri*. This is [why], when the Ark was hidden away[92] they forgot the letters *mem*, *nun*, *ṣadi*, *peh*, *kaf*[93] °(since those letters only appear in *ashuri*). When [the Israelites] were exiled to Assyria [*ashur*] and the Assyrians had come to know this script, they adopted it for themselves: they either had this script in addition to their native script from before [the exile of Israel], known to them from the holy [Torah] scroll, or they noticed it among the élite of the Jewish diaspora and came to covet it. [In either case,] the Israelites became familiar with that script through [the Assyrians], and this [was what R. Yose meant when he stated] "For it came up with them from *ashur*."[94]

See *ʿEn Yaʿaqov* °(Megillah, chapter 1). [The commentary] *Ha-Kotev* argued at length against the author of *ʿIqqarim* and for the compelling nature of Ritva's words, namely that the Sages only disagreed with regard to the texts that an individual would write for his own use.[95] The [Sages] were thus careful to write that "the Torah was given to Israel [in *ketav ʿivri*]," meaning to each and every individual,[96] since the *ashuri* script was not widely recognized among the multitude until the days of Ezra; but there is no doubt that the tablets and the [Torah] scroll of Moses were written in *ketav ashurit*.[97]

However, in the first chapter of Megillah of the *Targum Yerushalmi*, one finds [the following passage]:[98]

Rav Hisda understood the biblical description of the tablets as being *inscribed on both sides* (Ex. 32:15) to mean that they were hewn right through the stone. If so, the Hebrew *samekh* (formed like the English "o") and the final *mem* (looking roughly like a square) would leave behind a "center" unattached to the body of the tablet that would naturally fall away. R. Hisda thus asserted that the "center" remained miraculously suspended in place. Mendelssohn's parenthetical point was that this rabbinic statement made no sense if the tablets had been given in *ketav ʿivri*.

92. See Yoma 53b–54a. The ark contained the tablets with the original script; the inaccessibility of the ark thus meant that many were unfamiliar with *ketav ashurit*.

93. See n. 33 above.

94. San. 22a, as cited above. The citation of Ritva ends here.

95. The position laid out by Ibn Habib was that all the Talmudic Sages agreed that the Torah had been given in a script that came to be called *ketav ashurit*. The disagreement over *ketav ashurit* voiced in San. 21a–22b was whether, and how, the Jews lost their familiarity with the original script.

96. I.e., the Torah was given to individual Israelites for private and individual use in *ketav ʿivri*.

97. Mendelssohn thus opposed the position taken by Eichhorn in *Einleitung in das Alte Testament*, 1: 116–125 (§ 64–68), which appeared in 1780 and is cited below, p. 288. See glossary.

98. The passage follows Mishnah 9. Almost all the rabbinic and medieval sources that follow in this paragraph were cited in *Meʾor ʿEnayim*, ch. 56–58, which clearly served as the immediate basis of Mendelssohn's discussion. Note, however, that while de' Rossi's presentation highlighted the confusion that surrounded this question and led him to despair of any clarity on the issues (see, most especially, the concluding lines of ch. 58), Mendelssohn clearly disagreed with that

> R. Levi said: the one who said that the Torah was given in *roʿeṣ*[99] °(this implies that *roʿeṣ* is a word for a foreign script, like the word *laʿaz* is used for a foreign language) [regards] the [suspension of the] letter *ʿayin* as a miraculous act, and the one who said that the Torah was given in *ashuri* [regards] the [suspension of the] *samekh* as a miraculous act.

Indeed, we see that with the letters of the *Kutim* °(replicated by the author of *Imre Binah*, chapter 56)[100] the *ʿayin* was formed as a complete circle like our *samekh*, and thus R. Levi said that according to the one who said that the Torah was given in *roʿeṣ*—which is *ketavʿivri*—the *ʿayin* [inscribed into] the tablets was [suspended as] a miraculous act, and according to the one who said that the Torah was given in *ashuri*, the [suspension of the] *samekh* was a miraculous act.[101] In any event, we gather from his words that there was a singular opinion[102] that the tablets were also inscribed in *ketav ʿivri*, and not like the opinion of *Ha-Kotev* cited above that the Sages had never dissented on this issue; rather, they had dissented but [ultimately] agreed with our Holy Rabbi [Judah the Prince] and with R. Simeon that the Torah that Moses wrote and the tablets were in *ashurit*. The Geonim Rav Sherira and Rav Hai also affirmed this (in the responsa of R. Moses Alashqar, § 74).[103] And this is the language of Maimonides in his commentary on Mishnah Yadayim °(chapter 4, [mishnah 5]): "The script with which we write is *ketav ashuri*, the [same] script with which God wrote the Torah; it is called *ashuri* from the sense of greatness and splendor, as in *what fortune* [*be-ʾoshri*]! *For women will deem me fortunate* [*ishruni*] (Gen. 30:13); and thus the [Sages] said[104] that [it was called] *ashuri* because it was an excellent script." And Profiat Duran wrote likewise.[105] And R. Moses Alashqar concluded [his responsum] and wrote: "The Torah scroll[s] of the *Kutim* and all their books[106] are still written in that *ketav ʿivri* script, and even today they argue that the Torah

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assessment and presented an unequivocal view that preserved the antiquity and authority of the script in which the Torah was preserved.

99. Or: *raʿaṣ*; in his citation of San. 22a above the word was vocalized as *roʿeṣ*.

100. *Meʾor ʿEnayim*, 171a.

101. This view, in other words, accepted the possibility that the Torah had originally been inscribed with *ʿivri* characters, and not in the *ashuri* script in which the Torah later came to be written.

102. *daʿat yaḥid*, suggesting in rabbinic parlance that the authority accorded to such a view was nevertheless circumscribed.

103. R. Moses b. Isaac Alashqar (1466–1542), *Sheʾelot u-Teshuvot* (Sabbioneta, 1554), cited in *Meʾor ʿEnayim*, 178a.

104. San. 22a, as cited above.

105. Profiat Duran (d.c. 1415), *Maʿaseh Efod*, introduction, cited in *Meʾor ʿEnayim*, 178a–178b.

106. Reading *sifrehem*, in line with some printed versions of this introduction and with the citation as it appeared in de' Rossi.

was given in that script, and that they have a Torah scroll in Shechem written in the days of Pinhas the son of Eleazar, and other such things."[107]

I have seen the writings of Christian scholars who also testified and related that some small number of Samaritans[108] remain until this day on Mount Gerizim and in Shechem and the neighboring areas, and that they have a kind of sanctuary and an altar where their priests offer sacrifices and incense;[109] they say that they never engaged in idolatry, but that Hadrian set up an image of a dove on Mount Gerizim in order to anger them.[110] It is now almost two hundred years that the Christian scholar Usserius[111] obtained five or six copies of their Torah scroll written in *ḳetav ʿivri* and in Hebrew. In 1616, the French ambassador to the Turkish court, Baron de Sancy,[112] purchased in Damascus an exceedingly splendid Torah scroll in that script; he brought it to Paris, and it

107. Pinhas was the grandson of Aaron and the great-nephew of Moses who played a prominent role in the generation following the Exodus. Given that in the next sentence Mendelssohn turned his attention to modern European scholarship, this citation served to remind the reader that bold claims on behalf of the antiquity and authority of the Samaritan Pentateuch were hardly new.

108. *ḳutim*; Mendelssohn continued to use the rabbinic appellation, although the literature to which he referred used the more contemporary term, Samaritans.

109. Between the late sixteenth and the late seventeenth centuries, a number of leading European scholars established contact with Samaritans and obtained their texts and some knowledge regarding their history and beliefs. These writings were published and elicited broad interest, and some of them were reprinted by Johann Eichhorn in volume 13 of his *Repertorium für Biblische und Morgenländische Litteratur*, published at roughly the same time as Mendelssohn's introduction.

110. These claims touched on the fundamental issues that traditionally divided Jews and Samaritans and informed their mutual hostility. While the Samaritans viewed themselves as descendents of the ten northern tribes of Israel and preservers of authentic Israelite traditions, rabbinic Judaism associated them with the biblical *Kutim* of 2 Kgs. 17 and regarded them as foreign transplants to Israel who, despite their acceptance of the Jewish deity and Israelite practices, still maintained objectionable beliefs and practices. The most serious rabbinic charge against the Samaritans was their alleged worship of a Syrian deity in the form of a dove (see Ḥull. 6a). The charge of idolatry and its denial resonated in the early modern rediscovery of the Samaritans when the British Anglican Robert Huntington baited contemporary Samaritans with the accusation of dove worship, a charge they vehemently denied.

111. Jacobus Usserius, known in English as James Ussher (1581–1656), was the Primate of All Ireland and Archbishop of Armagh. As part of his quest for a precise dating of biblical events, he amassed a collection of Bibles, including copies of the Samaritan Pentateuch.

112. Achille de Harlay, the Baron de Sancy (1581–1646), was ambassador in Constantinople 1611–19. While pursuing a rather checkered diplomatic career, he developed a serious interest in Hebrew literature and quickly amassed a large and invaluable collection of biblical and medieval manuscripts. Harlay was particularly eager to purchase a Samaritan Pentateuch, and he commissioned his friend, the Roman patrician Pietro della Valle (1586–1652) to seek out a copy in his travels through the Levant. Although his efforts were initially frustrated, Valle finally located and purchased a Samaritan Pentateuch in Damascus. Harlay's role in this acquisition is generally underappreciated, but Mendelssohn appears to have gotten it right. Valle's travelogue, *Viaggi di Pietro della Valle il pellegrino* (1650–58) was oft-published and translated into French, English, and German; his account of these acquisitions appeared in Letter XIII.

was printed in 1632 in the Polyglot °(this is a Tanakh with translations into other languages).[113] English scholars corrected that script from the manuscripts of Usserius mentioned above, and they reprinted it in their Polyglot.[114] After analysis and careful attention to the manuscript copies of those texts, scholars have demonstrated with decisive proof that [the Samaritan Pentateuch] was copied from the script that we have in our possession to *ketav ʿivri*.[115] For they found a number of divergences and alterations from the Torah that we have in our possession, and upon analysis they found that most of the alterations resulted from the substitution of letters that were similar in their written form, as for example the *heh* and the *ḥet*, *resh* and *dalet*, *bet* and *kaf*, and the like. Once we see tangibly that in their *ʿivri* writing those letters are not at all similar and that it was not possible to [mistakenly] change them, one is compelled to say that the original scribe had before him a Torah written in *ashurit* wherein those letters were similar in written form, and that he erred and exchanged them. [Recent scholars] also found in [the Samaritan Pentateuch] added words that constitute a kind of commentary that the [Samaritans] introduced into the scriptural text, and they also altered it and wrote Mount Gerizim in the place of Mount Ebal °(Deut. 27:4) in self-interest. Most of the remaining differences and alterations that appear in their Scripture are scribal errors [caused] by negligence or by accident. In any event, *their fathers bequeathed them a lie* (Jer. 16:19) if they told

113. The Parisienne Polyglot was published by Guy Michel Lejay as *Biblia Hebraica, Samaritana* . . . (10 vols., 1629–45). The Samaritan Pentateuch was printed in the sixth volume (1632).

114. The reference is to Walton's London Polyglot. The Samaritan Pentateuch was printed alongside other versions and translations in volume 1; Walton's notes to this text and his careful comparison of the Hebrew and Samaritan versions appear in volume 6.

115. Mendelssohn's statement regarding the views of European scholars needs to be contextualized and qualified. There were two central and related issues that informed eighteenth-century discussions regarding the Samaritan Pentateuch: how one could account for the discrepancies between the Samaritan and Hebrew versions, and the overall value of the Samaritan text. At issue was the integrity and accuracy of the masoretic text, and ultimately its reliability and authority. Mendelssohn gave the impression that European scholars were broadly agreed that the masoretic Bible had been preserved in its original script and that the Samaritan version was imperfectly copied from the Hebrew. Mendelssohn, however, knew from Eichhorn's *Einleitung* that this view was hardly dominant and was advanced by only one scholar of his generation, Oluf Gerhard Tychsen, in his *Tentamen de variis codicum Hebraicorum Veteris Testamenti mss. generibus* (Rostock, 1772). Tychsen's work was almost immediately critiqued by Johann Matthäus Hassencamp, *Der Entdekte wahre Ursprung der alten Bibel-Uebersetzungen* (Minden, 1775). There were, to be sure, earlier scholars who more broadly impugned the value of the Samaritan Pentateuch, but by the mid-eighteenth century the consensus view was that of Benjamin Kennicott, the important British scholar who argued that the evidence of both the masoretic and the Samaritan Pentateuchs had to be weighted equally and "with impartiality . . . . The Pentateuch will never be understood perfectly, till we admit the authority of both"; see *The State of the Printed Hebrew Text . . . Dissertation the Second* (1759), 165. Eichhorn generally upheld the reliability of the masoretic text but without dismissing the critical evidence offered by the Samaritan version. See Eichhorn's *Einleitung*, 2: 155–190 (§ 383–89), and his detailed critique of Tychsen's position in § 385, pp. 168–74. Elsewhere, with regard to Tychsen's use of rabbinic literature, Mendelssohn himself acknowledged the highly problematic aspects of his scholarship; see *JubA*, 12,2:42.

them that [their Pentateuch] was written in the days of Pinhas the son of Eleazar, as R. Moses Alashqar wrote in their name.[116] [Those Christian scholars] also obtained their Aramaic translation [*Targum*] written in *ketavʿivri*, [this being the text referred to above] in the statement of the Sages "they left for the commoners [*hedyotot*] the *ketavʿivri* and Aramaic." This too was printed in the above-mentioned Polyglot Bibles.

At the end of his commentary on the Torah, Ramban wrote:

> *The Lord has blessed me so* (Josh. 17:14), and I came to Acre and I found in the possession of the elders of the land a silver coin engraved with the *seal engravings* (Ex. 28:11), with one side having the likeness of a *branch of an almond tree* (Jer. 1:11) and the other side the likeness of a vial; on both sides, around [the engravings] was writing inscribed *with clear script* (Deut. 27:8).[117] They showed the writing to the Samaritans and they read it straight away, since it was *ketavʿivri* that was retained by the *Kutim* as mentioned in tractate Sanhedrin. On one side they read "Sheqel of Sheqels" and on the other side "Holy Jerusalem," etc.[118]

Likewise, Maimonides wrote in a responsum that the letters and profane books and all that is engraved on coins and holy sheqels are written in *ketavʿivri*, since "it was forbidden to write in *ketav ashuri* in which the Torah was given except [in the writing of] Holy Scripture; and Jews never ceased to be vigilant about this."[119]

[(4)] Let us speak about the articulation of the script, namely the spaces, vowel points, and cantillation. The scroll that Moses wrote for Israel had neither vowel points nor cantillation, and masters of the *Qabbalah* say that it had no spaces between verses or between words, since this is what Ramban wrote at the beginning of his commentary on the Torah: "It appears that the Torah was written with [letters of] black fire upon [a background of] white fire[120] in the manner that we have mentioned, with the writing appearing in a continuous sequence without any space between the words; it was thus possible in reading it to read it as Divine Names, and also to read it in our [usual] way pertaining to instruction and commandment. It was given to Moses [in written form] in the manner of a discrete reading of the commandment[s], while its reading as Divine Names was transmitted to him orally."

You know that it is altogether impossible to impart the words of the Torah and the commandments to a student and to make him comprehend such that he

116. See n. 103.

117. Mendelssohn had translated these words: *mit deutlicher Schrift*.

118. In *Meʾor ʿEnayim*, 171b, de' Rossi cited this same passage from Ramban but pointed out—correctly, as it happens—that the coin actually read "Sheqel of Israel." The correct reading also appeared in Eichhorn, *Einleitung*, 1:120 (§ 66). Mendelssohn chose to ignore this, seemingly because it did not affect his broader point.

119. Mendelssohn's source for this citation was *Meʾor ʿEnayim*, 178a.

120. See P. Sheq. 6:1 and Song. R. to 5:11 with slight variations.

understands their straightforward and evident meaning, not to mention their allusions and hidden meanings, without a differentiation of the syllables and sounds that are denoted with intervals, vowel points, and cantillation. As such, there is no doubt that Moses made known this differentiation of sounds and transmitted them orally to Joshua, from whom the tradition was passed down, as is known. Thus the *Kuzari* °(III:30): "[With regard to] the Torah scroll that Moses wrote for Israel, there is no doubt that the scroll was unadorned, without vocalization and cantillation, as we see in the Torah scrolls today, etc." And in section 31:

> The rabbi said: there is no doubt that [the Torah] was preserved in [people's] memories with the *pataḥ* and the *qamaṣ*, the *ṣere* and [other] derivative vowels, and the *sheva* and the cantillation; [it was preserved] by the priests because of their need for it in the Temple service and to teach the Israelites; by the kings on account of their being commanded *Let it remain with him and let him read it all the days of his life* (Deut. 17:19); by the judges because of their need for them in rendering judgment; by the Sanhedrin because of their need for them, as it is written *Observe them well and practice them, for they will be your wisdom and discernment* (Deut. 4:6); by the pious ones in order to reap reward; and by the hypocrites in order to promote themselves. They affixed the seven [main] vowels and cantillation as signs to indicate those qualities, which they copied as a tradition from Moses.[121]

Recent scholars applied themselves to determine [the following]: when were these diacritical marks in our possession today applied to those phonetic variations, and who invented them?[122] A number of scholars have dealt with this at length: the great grammarian Elijah Bahur [Levita][123] in the third introduction of his book *Masoret ha-Masoret*;[124] the author of *Imre Binah*, in chapter 59;[125] and

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121. This rendition of the *Kuzari* follows the commentary of *Oṣar Neḥmad*.

122. Although Mendelssohn focused his discussion on Jewish views of the genesis and antiquity of the vocalization, he was well aware of extensive Christian writings going back a century that also addressed this subject. Among the texts that Mendelssohn knew were Walton's *Biblia Sacra Polyglotta*, 1, Prolegomena III, § 38–55; Johann David Michaelis, "Von dem Alter der Hebräischen Vocalen, und übrigen Punkte," *Vermischte Schriften* (Frankfurt, 1766–1769) 2:1–143; and Eichhorn, *Einleitung*, 1:126–39 (§ 68–69).

123. Although Mendelssohn referred to him throughout as Baḥur, he is generally known in modern scholarship by his Latinized name Levita.

124. This book was first published in Venice 1538 and reprinted three more times before 1780. A German translation was published by the noted Halle professor and Bible scholar Johann Salomo Semler, *Übersetzung des Buchs Massoreth Hamassoreth* (Halle, 1772), which opened with a lengthy and appreciative dedication to Mendelssohn. Semler admired Mendelssohn's sophistication and enlightened religiosity and assumed that this Jewish savant shared his contempt for "superstitiously held opinions" regarding Scripture, including the belief in the antiquity and authority of the masoretic vocalization.

125. *Imre Binah* was the main and largest part of de' Rossi's *Me'or 'Enayim*.

the physician Anshel Worms in his book *Seyyag la-Torah*.[126] Some of them say that those diacritical signs were also transmitted from Sinai, and they brought proofs toward this end. They did not, however, explain whether they meant that those markings were transmitted orally, or whether they were inserted from that time in the [privately held] books of individuals and then copied out for us. Others say that they were invented in the days of the Men of the Great Assembly, and their proof is [the tractates] Megillah °(3a) and Nedarim °(37b):

> What is [the meaning of] the verse *They read from the book, the law of God, explicated; making it intelligible, they understood the reading* °(Neh. 8:8)? *They read from the book, the law of God*—this refers to Scripture; *explicated* [*meforash*] refers to *Targum* [= the Aramaic translation]; *making it intelligible* refers to the [demarcation of] verses; and *they understood the reading*—this refers to the punctuation [indicated] by means of the cantillation, or some say that it refers to the masoretic traditions.

These words suggest that all this was available to them in their books and indicated with signs and markings from Ezra and his circle who constituted the Men of the Great Assembly. Levita sought to refute this claim by saying that the passage only suggested that when Ezra and his colleagues read the Torah to Israel they translated it for them orally in Aramaic, which was their language at the time, and that they would pause between each verse and word as was the tradition from Moses—and [that the passage] did not mean that they had the cantillation that we have in our possession. However, his words are not possible, since the Sages said that what Ezra gave the Israelites in *ketav ashurit* was the translation, and so they already had the translation in writing and not only orally, as Levita thought. It appears that this was also the case for the vowel points and the cantillation marks, which were all marked and recorded for them in writing.

It is the opinion of Levita that those diacritical marks were not known in their form and by name in the days of the Talmudic Sages; rather, they were invented after its completion in the days of the masoretes[127]—who were Tiberians, in his view—and who had a greater expertise in Scripture and linguistic refinement than all the other Jews of those generations; *nor did any like them arise afterwards* (2 Kgs. 23:25). They arranged all the vocalization and cantillation in a systematic fashion. However, the names of the vowel points and the cantillation changed afterwards in each generation, according to the grammarians among the generations of scholars.

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126. Asher Anshel Worms (1695–1769) was a physician in Frankfurt. *Seyyag la-Torah* (Frankfurt, 1766) was one of the first Jewish texts to express awareness of, and concern for, new critical approaches to the Bible.

127. I.e., sometime between the sixth and tenth centuries.

The author of *Imre Binah* refuted [Levita's] notions on the basis of the writings of early Kabbalists—namely *Sefer ha-Bahir*,[128] the *Zohar*,[129] the *Tiqqunim*,[130] and the *Idra*[131]—which pre-dated not only the completion of the Talmud but also the composition of the Mishnah [c. 200], and which mention the names of the vowel points and the cantillation in the form that we have them.[132] He added, as an apologia for Levita, that those books were not printed and not well known in his day,[133] and that if he were with us today, he would admit [the point] and concur.[134] Now, the proof adduced from those books is not so compelling, since they were not as universally accepted by the entire diaspora as the Mishnah and Talmud, and it is possible that with the passage of time, the length of the exile, and the migrations, things were added that did not stem from their early authors but were [nevertheless] attributed to them. This was attested by the Gaon, our teacher and master R. Jacob b. Tzvi [Emden] in *Mitpaḥat Sefarim*, wherein he put forth many clear proofs that are irrefutable.[135] [This was the case] also with regard to our subject: how can we adduce proof from [the fact that] the vowels and the cantillation are mentioned in the *Zohar*, when that text also mentions "masters of grammar"[136] who without any doubt appeared only after the Geonim, with the first of them being, as is known, Judah [ibn] Hayyuj?[137] However, seeing that there is no decisive argument for Levita's opinion from the words of the Talmudic Sages—for the recent authors that we mentioned rose against him and refuted and rebuffed all his proofs, smashing all the pillars

128. *Sefer ha-Bahir* was attributed to the first-century Sage, Nehunya ben ha-Qanah; this text first emerged in its present form in late twelfth-century Provence.

129. The *Zohar* was the classical Kabbalistic text traditionally attributed to the first-century Sage, R. Simeon bar Yohai; it first circulated in late thirteenth-century Christian Spain.

130. The *Tiqqunim*, formally known as *Tiqqune ha-Zohar*, was one of three main books of Zoharic literature.

131. *Idra* referred to two sections of the central Zoharic text, the *Zohar* to the Pentateuch, known as *Idra' Rabba* and *Idra' Zuta*.

132. Note that by the eighteenth century the antiquity of these Kabbalistic texts were not universally assumed. Elijah Delmedigo's fifteenth-century *Beḥinat ha-Dat*, first published in 1629, argued against the antiquity of Kabbalah in general and the *Zohar* in particular. Leone Modena also raised such doubts in his *Ari Nohem* (written c. 1639), which circulated unpublished among scholars of the eighteenth century. See also n. 135 below.

133. Levita died in 1549, while the books of the *Zohar* were printed in 1558.

134. The argument presented here is a highly compressed version of de' Rossi's discussion in *Me'or 'Enayim*, 179a–b.

135. R. Emden's *Mitpaḥat Sefarim* (Altona, 1768) embraced the veracity of Kabbalistic teachings but pointed to many instances in which the *Zohar* incorporated material that was decidedly post-rabbinic, dating them to the thirteenth century. Mendelssohn was careful to note these interpolations without undermining the antiquity of all Kabbalistic teachings, and elsewhere he drew on the *Zohar* in tandem with rabbinic citations. See, for example, the *Be'ur* to Gen. 1:31 below.

136. See *Tiqqune ha-Zohar*, 7b, which cited grammarians who defined the *qamaṣ* as a long vowel.

137. This argument was taken from *Mitpaḥat Sefarim*, 13b (no. 185). Judah Ibn Hayyuj lived in the tenth century.

[of his assertions] upon which he leaned with correct arguments[138]—the statements adduced by the author of *Imre Binah* from the Kabbalistic texts are sufficient to dismiss Levita's notions. On their basis, what R. Azariah, *who knows the meaning of things* (Ecc. 8:1), wrote in chapter fifty-nine of his book seems correct in my eyes, and I will relate his opinion on this to you with different words and a few additional remarks:

Moses wrote the holy Torah without any vocalization or cantillation whatsoever, and communicated the manner of reading and the variegated pronunciations and intonations and pauses very clearly. But Moses did not inscribe their diacritical marks in his Torah, even though without them a few of the words might be subject to uncertainty. He had an important reason for doing this, for he did not want anyone to contemplate its commandments without oral transmission, as the wise [author of the] *Kuzari* indicated in part II.[139] And thus Moses also began with the straightforward reading with which we [too] begin. However, the different vowel points were written at that time in a few of the scrolls, and in particular on the stones, as the author of *Ha-Semadar* stated:[140] it is written *You shall record* [*all the words of this teaching on those stones*] *with clear script* (Deut. 27:8), which the reader would not comprehend without the vocalization; and who would explain [the text] to him there on the banks of the river?[141] As long as the broad populace of Israelites regularly employed a refined Hebrew in their profane dealings, every one of them knew and understood the vowel points and the biblical cantillation and effortlessly grasped the intended sense [of Scripture] in accordance with its *peshaṭ*, for they had an everyday familiarity with these aspects [of the language]. One who heard the reading of the Torah from his father or teacher once or twice would be able to retain [a familiarity] with the demarcation of verses and the quality of the sounds without need to devote substantive and detailed attention and much effort into a careful consideration of how they are written, [unlike] an individual who has neither experience nor familiarity with these [verses] from his mother's bosom or his schoolroom. At that time, perhaps, individuals who wrote books for their own use did not include all the vowel points and cantillation with each and every word, as we do today, but only where necessary; they sometimes omitted

138. See n. 134 and *Seyyag la-Torah*, 6a–9b.

139. The reference is presumably to II:72. This sentence and the one that follows were taken almost verbatim from *Me'or ʿEnayim*, 180a.

140. This text is unknown to us, as it was unknown to Mendelssohn; it was cited in the introduction to Levita's *Masoret ha-Masoret*, and then in *Me'or ʿEnayim*, from where Mendelssohn drew these lines. Levita had followed the citation of this prooftext and its claim with a statement of mild skepticism; de' Rossi, however, embraced the argument and Mendelssohn endorsed his position fully.

141. The allusion to the riverbank is a reference to Deut. 27:4, wherein the Israelites were commanded to inscribe the stones upon crossing the Jordan. This extended sentence was also taken almost verbatim from *Me'or ʿEnayim*, 180a.

them because their familiarity made it easy for them to read and understand the meaning without them.

When [the Israelites] were exiled to Babylonia and forgot their language and forsook the Torah and how to read it, it appears that the vowel points were also forgotten until Ezra provided the Torah translation into the language they spoke, namely Aramaic, and in *ketav ashurit*, and he also reintroduced the vowel points and affixed them properly. It was the intention of that excellent individual that by means of a Torah translation into a language regularly spoken among them they would understand Scripture in Hebrew as well, *making it intelligible* (Neh. 8:8), with consideration and careful attention to the cantillation. By reading the translation of the Torah in *ketav ashurit* they became familiar with this felicitous script that had been forgotten among them until his time, and they could [now] read it in Hebrew as well. But who can breathe the spirit of life into a dead language that was all but forgotten? They already needed careful consideration, special concentration, and much understanding in order to know the ways and meanings of the language, and this was possible only with individuals who preserve the Torah and *come early to its gates each day* (Prov. 8:34). During the second commonwealth, most of the nation regularly employed Aramaic or Greek even with regard to matters pertaining to the Torah, as we will mention below. [Thus, knowledge of] the vowel points continued to decline and were known only to a few, those being superior men, scholars [devoted to] the truth, and [this happened] in a manner that one ought not be surprised if there was some uncertainty with regard to a few words, as the Sages mentioned.[142] [This continued until] after the completion of the Talmud °(as Levita wrote), when the scholars of Tiberias or others who knew of them saw fit to make a kind of fence and safeguard [to ensure] correct modes of reading, by setting in place diacriticals and signs for some of the letters, words, verses, and sections; and a record of all the discrepancies and irregularities that occurred among the vowel points and cantillation. By these means the Torah and Scripture were *installed in place* (Neh. 8:7, 13:11). *From the Eternal came* this good *turn* (Ps. 118:23, 2 Chron. 10:15), with His mercy upon our remnant, to give His Torah and commandments a *prop and stay* (Isa. 3:1) until there arrives *the time of love* when He will *raise up the booth of David* from the dust (Ez. 16:8, Amos 9:11),[143] and He will say to the fallen Fair Zion: rise upon your feet and live! He will imbue his spirit in the excellent language as well, reviving and re-establishing it in its rightful place as it was formerly.

142. The last two sentences and the first half of the following one were again taken from *Me'or 'Enayim*, 180a. That text supplied the rabbinic sources referred to here: M. A.Z. 2:5, Shab. 147b, and B.B. 21b.

143. The first half of the sentence was from *Me'or 'Enayim*, 180a; the remaining lines until the end of the paragraph were Mendelssohn's own.

The matter also appears to be the same with regard to the *qere* and *ketiv*.[144] In his Torah, Moses wrote only the *ketiv*, and when he transmitted it to Joshua he would read to him according to the *qere*, explaining to him the hidden meaning of the discrepancy; and from him, it was transmitted from one individual to the next. Our Sages addressed this in the fourth chapter of Nedarim °(37b): "[Words] read but not written, and written but not read, are a teaching of Moses from Sinai," for they heard the reading in this way from Moses, [who stood at] the head of the true tradition.[145] The Sages only mentioned "[words] read but not written, and written but not read," but the *qere* and *ketiv* are included in this, for in every instance that the reading differs from what is written, the *ketiv* is a case of "written and not read"; and the *qere* corresponds to "read but not written." For example, where the *ketiv* is *naʿar* [young man] and the *qere* is *naʿarah* [maiden],[146] *naʿar* is written and not read, and *naʿarah* is read and not written, and all this is a teaching of Moses from Sinai. [Elsewhere,] the Sages referred to the *qere* by the term *miqra* and *ketiv* by the term *masorah*, and they said "One scholar maintains that that written text is authoritative" and "another scholar maintains that the traditional reading is authoritative."[147]

It may be that even in early times individuals were fearful lest they forget these variations that they heard from their teacher, for the discrepancies of the *qere* and *ketiv* were not linguistically compelling such that someone with a mastery of language would derive them on his own; nor were they devised by one's own mind, as some writers have thought °(see what Jacob b. Hayyim wrote in his introduction to the Tanakh, *Miqra Gedolah*).[148] Rather, they came to convey a particular meaning that was liable to be forgotten, and in order to avoid this they wrote the *qere* on the pages of the books they had in their [private] possession, inserting notes for themselves for the purpose of memory alone. [This continued] until the arrival of Ezra and his supporters, and after him the master[s] of the *masorah*, generation after generation; they examined all the differences and variations that they found in the Torah scrolls, and devoted much effort and significant and punctilious attention to each and every word and letter. Using

144. The *qere/ketiv* refers to a masoretic discrepancy between the way the text was written and the way it was read; such discrepancies were indicated by marginal notes. An English equivalent would be a text employing the word "writ" but with a footnote indicating that it be read as "write."

145. *ha-qabbalah ha-ʾamitit*; Mendelssohn's use of this phrase is noteworthy in light of the fact that in early modern writings it referred almost exclusively to Jewish mystical traditions.

146. E.g., Gen. 24:14; the same *qere/ketiv* appears in almost two dozen instances in the Pentateuch.

147. The phrases *yesh em la-miqra* and *yesh em la-masoret* are cited about a dozen times in rabbinic literature; see, e.g., Sukk. 6b, San. 4a.

148. This was a reference to the Venice 1524–25 Bomberg edition of the Hebrew Bible, edited by Jacob b. Hayyim Ibn Adoniyahu, which was then commonly known as *Miqra Gedolah*, i.e., the large folio-sized Scripture. (The more familiar name, *Miqraʾot Gedolot*, came into use only in the nineteenth century.)

the scrolls in their possession that had been inspected,[149] they removed every confusion and mistake from those that had not been inspected; and where there appeared some doubt among the inspected scrolls themselves, they followed the majority as per the biblical rule *incline after the majority* (Ex. 23:2).[150] And so it appears in tractate Soferim °(6:4):

> R. Simeon b. Lakish said: Three Torah scrolls were found in the Temple court: the *meʿonah* scroll, the *zaʾṭuṭe* scroll, and the *hiʾ* scroll. In one [scroll] they found the word *maʿon*, in the [other] two *meʿonah* [*the abode*] *of the ancient God* (Deut. 33:27), so they adopted the reading of the two scrolls and discarded the one. In one [scroll] they found written *He sent zaʿtute* [*young men*; or, *nobles*] *of the Israelites* (Ex. 24:5), and in two they found *He sent naʿare* [young men] *of the Israelites*, so they adopted the reading of the two scrolls and discarded the one. In one [scroll] the word *huʾ*[151] was written eleven times, and in two *hiʾ* was written eleven times,[152] so they adopted the reading of the two scrolls and discarded the one.

[Those scholars] transmitted diacritical signs for every textual lacuna, superfluity, variation, *qere*, and *ketiv*, and they wrote those signs on the pages of books belonging to individuals or in a special compilation arranged alphabetically, this being the *masorah* recorded in [the margins of] the pages and the compiled *masorah*.[153] They used this as a fence and reliable safeguard for our holy Torah, such that the Torah could not be altered in any way, even [something as small] as the point of a *yud*. *As long as the heaven will be over the earth* (Deut. 11:21) it is preserved and set out in our hands, *and will not be forgotten from the mouths of* our *progeny* (Deut. 31:21).

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149. That is, checked and approved.

150. Mendelssohn cited the verse in its rabbinic meaning; see his *Beʾur* to Ex. 23:2.

151. *huʾ*, the pronoun employed for the third-person singular masculine, is spelled *heh–vav–aleph* with the *vav* vocalized with a *shuruq*; in some instances, however, the same word is vocalized as the third-person singular feminine, *hiʾ*, with a *hiriq* beneath the *heh*.

152. In these instances, the feminine pronoun was spelled *heh–yud–aleph*. The list is provided in A.R. 34:4.

153. The reference here was to two kinds of masoretic annotations found in the Venice 1525 Bible: (1) the *masorah parve* and *masorah magna* found along the inner and upper/lower margins of each page, referred to in Hebrew as *masorah ha-gilyonit* (in Latin: *masorah marginalis*); (2) the *masorah finalis*, a much lengthier compilation that appeared at the end of the book and was lexically arranged in units that Ibn Adoniyahu termed *maʿarekhet*; hence the name *masorah ha-maʿarakhit*.

[Section II]

REGARDING TRANSLATIONS

One who conveys a passage from the language of one people to that of another people is called a translator [*metargem*] °(*Verdolmetscher*) and the *nomen agentis*[1] derived from it is *meturgeman*. [The biblical passage] *for there was an interpreter* [*ha-meliṣ*] *between them* °(Gen. 42:23) [was rendered in Aramaic] "for there was a *meturgeman* between them."[2] [Similarly,] *he will serve as your mouth*[3] °(Ex. 4:16) [was rendered] "he will be for you a *meturgeman*."[4] [That word] can also be used in reference to the original language in which the words are spoken, [as in the example] [*the letter was . . .*] *presented* [*meturgam*] *in Aramaic* °(Ezra 4[:7]) °(in German, *vorgetragen*). The translator communicates the intended meaning of a passage in the language of another people, and the exegete or commentator also communicates the meaning of the passage, except that the commentator uses synonymous expressions in the very same language that the first speaker used, which is not the case with one who is translating. Take, for example, *In the beginning God created* (Gen. 1:1): the exegete or commentator would explain that "in the beginning the Omnipotent brought forth existence from nothingness," his intention being to explain the meaning of the passage in different synonymous words that are more readily understood by the listener or reader. The translator, [however,] would say this in the language of another people *Im Anfange schuf Gott*.

The most skilled translator cannot communicate, with brevity and precision, the speaker's intended meaning without some addition, omission, or divergence; this is known to every intelligent man who understands languages and the great difference between them. The meanings of even the most analogous words of

1. *shem ha-qinyan*, i.e., a noun that refers to the performer of an action.

2. In Mendelssohn's German translation, *ha-meliṣ* was rendered *ein Dolmetscher*.

3. I.e., your mouthpiece. Mendelssohn's German translation had: *So, dass er dir zu einem Munde dienen (das heisst, deine Worte vorbringen) soll*.

4. The text here has a typographical error, *le-turgeman*, instead of *limeturgeman*, which is how it appeared in the text of Onqelos in the Berlin 1705 Bible.

two languages are not entirely equivalent; most are similar only in their primary and essential meanings, but very often differ in their ancillary and incidental meanings. Take for example the word *enosh* [human being], in German *Mensch*; these words are similar in their essential meaning, since they connote a rational being. However, in Hebrew that word has an ancillary connotation, whose sense is indicated [in the verse] *The heart is deceitful above all things, and afflicted* [*ve-'anush*] °(Jer. 17:9), which is not the case with the word *Mensch* in German. And so, if one translating from Hebrew to German would in every case render *enosh* as *Mensch*, he would not completely explain the intended meaning of the word, since the speaker would sometimes also have in mind that ancillary meaning and would need it for the matter that he sought to express. If, however, the German translator would insert *geplagter Mensch* [into the translation of the verse][5] he would also deviate from the intention of the original speaker, for he may at times have reason not to spell out that ancillary meaning explicitly, but only allude to it. If you consider [the matter] carefully, you will find that each and every word of a language has some aspect that makes that word different and distinct, not only from all the other words of that language, but from the words by which they may be translated into another language, even if it initially appears that the word might be entirely similar to them in meaning. [Moreover,] each and every language has a distinct word order, and when the translator is forced to change the word order in accordance with the nature of the language into which he translates, it is impossible for him to do so without also slightly changing their meaning and their impression on the listener's mind. This is known to anyone who has insight into the workings of the mind—that every arrangement of words makes a distinct impression unlike another [arrangement]. For example, it is written *if they have come out for peace, capture them alive* [*tifsum ḥayyim*]; *if they have come out for battle,* [still] *capture them alive* [*ḥayyim tifsum*] °(1 Kgs. 20:18); the word *tifsum* is the predicate °(*verbum*) and the word *ḥayyim* modifies the verb °(*adverbium*), and in Hebrew the predicate sometimes precedes its modifier, and sometimes the modifier comes before the predicate, according to the principal intention of the speaker. Hence, the thrust of this passage, and the principal intention of the speaker, is made known by the word order, once rendered *tifsum ḥayyim*, and once *ḥayyim tifsum*. This is because if they have come out for peace, it is obvious that they should not be killed, but they were nonetheless instructed to capture them; for this reason, he began with *tifsum*, since that was his principal intention. However, if they have come out for battle, there is no reason to capture them, but he nevertheless instructed to let them live, and he thus said *ḥayyim tifsum*. And what is the translator to do if the conventions of the language into which he is translating do not allow for this inverted word order, and compels the placement of the adverb before

5. Rendering the end of the verse "and he an afflicted [or: troubled] man."

the predicate, or vice versa? If one translates the statement word for word, the listener would not understand it at all. And what is the difference in German between *ergreift sie lebendig* and *lebendig ergreift sie*? Only that to say [the latter] is contrary to the conventions of German. And if one [translates] expansively and adds to the words of the original speaker in order to clarify his intention, he has effaced the euphony of the phrase and its impression on the mind.

Likewise, each language differs from others in the manner of its style, each one having unique qualities that are absent in the others. Consequently, if you translate a passage word for word and particle for particle into another language, an adept of that language will not understand it at all. And even if he grasps the essential meaning, he will have no sense of the pleasing effect of the style and the *grace of its arrangements* (Job 41:4) as it is in the language from which it was translated. Note that the translator most praised by the Sages, namely Onqelos the proselyte, was himself often compelled to vary, supplement, reverse, and alter the order of the words, in accordance with the conventions of the language he was using. These are the words of Levita in the introduction to his book, *Meturgeman*:[6]

> The Aramaic translators did not always adhere to grammatical conventions and translated the past tense with the future tense, the future with the past tense, and occasionally the present tense with either past or future. Similarly, infinitives with [the prepositional prefix] *bet* or *khaf* of [the regular prepositions] *bet*, *khaf*, *lamed*, *mem* were mainly translated using the past tense, but sometimes the future tense. They occasionally translated a biblical verse in line with what was appropriate to the language of translation and not the language of Scripture. And so, Rashi often wrote that "Onqelos explained the word so that it fit properly, but he was not precise with regard to the language of Scripture."[7] There are words that [the Targumim] did not translate at all, [rendering] only their intention, such as *for with my staff* °(Gen. 32:11) [which was translated as] "for alone . . ." and likewise *their worms shall not die* °(Isa. 66:24) [which was translated] "their souls shall not die." There are words that they translated contrary to the intended meaning,[8] like *My Presence itself shall not remain with you* (Ex. 33:3),[9] and likewise *he no longer went, as he had until now, to discharge spells* °(Num. 24:1);[10] see the sources cited. They sometimes translated according to what was fitting in Aramaic and not the

6. First published in 1541 and reprinted in 1560, it provided a lexicon of the Aramaic translations of Scripture.

7. See, e.g., Rashi to Gen. 43:3. Levita overstated the case somewhat, since Rashi offered such formulations only a handful of times.

8. At this juncture Mendelssohn omitted two lines of Levita's text, including a reference to Jer. 17:9 cited above. Mendelssohn differed with Onqelos in his understanding of that verse, and the omission may have been partly prompted by a desire to avoid confusion or an impertinent digression.

9. Onqelos translated that verse: "for I will not remove my divine presence from your midst."

10. Onqelos translated: "he did not go as he had time and again, except to advance spells."

> language of Scripture, with no difference in meaning, as in *and the children of Israel went with an uplifted hand* ʿ(Ex. 14:8) [which was translated] "with uncovered head"; for in Aramaic this is the common way to speak about something that a person does without fear in public view. And likewise, *put them to the sword* (Num. 21:24) [was translated as] "with the edge of the sword" because this was customary in Aramaic. These are some of the methods of the Aramaic translators.

Truthfully, anyone who wants to add examples and confirmation of this from Onqelos' Targum can read any chapter of Scripture that he wishes and then consider the translation—he will find that these words are correct and straightforward. How many of the words [of Scripture] did this most excellent [scholar] need to substitute in order to avoid any attribution of corporeality to God, as the author of the *Guide* mentioned in his book, and for which he deservedly praised [Onqelos]?[11] There are some instances when the words have no trace of corporeality in Hebrew—in accordance with the felicitous principle of that language—although a word-for-word translation into another language would lend itself to corporeality, heaven forbid. He therefore occasionally added or substituted [words] in order to safeguard against any pitfall, as is known to one who studies it. Here you see that the reliable translator must sometimes alter [the text], adding or removing [words], or changing the [word] order of the passage in order to convey the intended meaning of the speaker. No one distorts or destroys the intended meaning more than one who preserves the [original] words, or one who translates word for word and particle for particle, even though at first glance it appears that he is more faithful and diligent in his craft. It was for this reason that in a number of instances the Sages censured one who interprets Scripture in its outward form, meaning one who preserves the words and translates or explains word for word without any change or divergence whatsoever, even where the conventions of the language should compel him to preserve the meanings and abandon the words.[12] One who translates in this manner is called a deceiver for he appears to be a reliable translator in that he did not fail to translate every word; but he misleads because the sense was lost and the intended meaning was confused. This is what the Sages said in the second chapter of Qiddushin and the end of Tosefta Megillah, "One who translates a verse in its outward form—he is a deceiver."[13]

As long as Jews did not replace their language,[14] and the speech of *the beautiful land* (Dan. 11:16) was practiced and fluent in the mouths of the multitude,

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11. See *Guide* I:27–28; and cf. I:48.

12. The last phrase, *lishmor ha-ṭeʿamim ve-laʿazov ha-millot*, echoed Ibn Ezra's exegetical notion and had been earlier cited in Mendelssohn's introduction to *Megillat Qohelet*; see p. 124 above. See also Ibn Ezra's Long Commentary on Ex. 11:5, 18:21, and 20:1.

13. Qidd. 49a and T. Meg. 3:41.

14. This formulation alluded to a midrashic statement that suggested that the preservation of Hebrew was one of the primary factors that enabled the Israelites to preserve their ethnic identity during their enslavement in Egypt. See Mekh. *Bo*, section 5, and *Qohelet Musar*, p. 29 above.

both young and old, there was no need for a translation of the Torah. Anyone hearing it from a reader who was properly meticulous with regard to the vocalization, intonation, and cantillation would understand the *peshaṭ* meaning of the passage on his own; for they regularly used similar modes of expression, tones, and cantillation with their [daily] affairs and dealings. And in the event that one did not grasp the meaning of Scripture, he made use of an explanation, namely *the meaning of the thing* (Ecc. 8:1) by way of different expressions in Hebrew itself, but not by means of a translation in a language of a *barbaric people* (Ps. 114:1).[15] If an individual could draw from a well of *living waters*, why *hew broken cisterns* (Jer. 2:13)?

However, when they were exiled to Babylonia and mingled among the nations by marrying foreign women, they neglected their language, as Scripture attests: *Also at that time I saw that Jews had married Ashdodite, Ammonite, and Moabite women; and their children spoke half in the language of Ashdod and did not know how to speak Judean, but the language of each people* °(Neh. 13:[23–]24). And even though the Babylonian exile was brief °(for they were in Babylonia only seventy years) and not as long as the enslavement in Egypt where they [still] preserved their language,[16] they nevertheless forgot the language of their forefathers during the [Babylonian] exile on account of the foreign women that they married, for they were the very ones who taught their language to the children they bore. The language of the nation that ruled over them in Babylonia was also closer to Hebrew than the Egyptian language, and thus more prone to the confusion and mixing of expressions. °(This is just as we regularly see, when Italians living in France forget their language in a short amount of time, and likewise Germans when they are banished to Holland or Sweden. But this does not happen with languages that are dissimilar. Our Jewish brethren, banished from Germany [*ashkenaz*] to Poland, have still not forgotten their Germanic language [*leshon ashkenaz*][17] at all, even if the pronunciation has been distorted due to the length of time.) They became accustomed to speaking the language of their captors, and the exceptional virtue of Hebrew was only maintained among the remaining scholars of the generation who constantly meditated on the Torah. And even when they later returned to Jerusalem only a few of them did so, *the whole assembly together was forty-two thousand three hundred and sixty, aside from their male and female slaves* °(Ezra 2:64[–65]). Indeed, when *the craftsmen*

15. *ʿam loʿez*; Mendelssohn translated this as *Barbarnvolke*, and not, as it was understood by many medieval exegetes, "foreign speech."

16. See n. 14.

17. Mendelssohn consistently used one and the same term to refer to the Judeo-German spoken among Jews and contemporary German, including *Hochdeutsch*. See, e.g., pp. 289, 292 below. From Mendelssohn's perspective Judeo-German was not a distinct language but rather an archaic German that, due to the circumstances described here, developed and evolved separately from the German of northern and central Europe. The translation of *leshon ashkenaz* as "Germanic language" seeks to mirror Mendelssohn's linguistic perspective.

and the smiths (Jer. 29:2) and most of the scholars saw that *this was not the resting place* (Mic. 2:10) and the true redemption promised by all the prophets of God, they remained in Babylonia.

When Ezra and his supporters saw that Hebrew had been forgotten by the multitude of Israel they translated the Torah into Aramaic, [the language] with which they were familiar and conducted all their [daily] affairs, just as the Sages noted when they said that the Torah was given again to Israel in the days of Ezra in Aramaic;[18] and they likewise said that [the biblical word] "*explicated* [*meforash*] (Neh. 8:8) refers to the Aramaic translation [*targum*]."[19] [Ezra's] intent was that by means of the translation they would understand Scripture and gain an appreciation of the language that had been forgotten, and that they would renew their study of it; for this is how one learns to understand another language with which he is not familiar. [Ezra and his supporters] also instituted the prayer of the eighteen benedictions in Hebrew so that they would be well ordered and properly arranged in the mouths of all.[20] This was necessary because from the days of Moses until Ezra, every individual prayed and offered supplications and petitions to the best of his ability; some prayed once a day, others prayed many times, depending on how his heart aroused him *to pour forth his pleas* (Ps. 102:1), be it *to praise and extol the Eternal* (1 Chron. 25:3) for the good He has given him, or to declare before Him *his affliction and pain* and troubles (2 Chron. 6:29); [those Jews] did not need a prescribed version at all. There is no advocate like the heart aroused on its own account, and the conventions of the language were known to all. Now, however, they needed a permanent and articulate version, as Maimonides wrote °([*Mishneh Torah*,] Laws Concerning Prayers 1:4):

> When [the Jews] were exiled in the days of the wicked Nebuchadnezzar, they mingled with the Persians, Greeks, and other nations, and children were born to them in those lands. The speech of those children became confused, each of them using an admixture of many tongues. They spoke incoherently, since no one could speak well enough in any one language, as it says *and their children spoke half in the language of Ashdod*, etc. °(Neh. 13:24), *and did not know how to speak Judean, but* [rather] *the language of each people*. As a result, whenever one of them prayed he was unable to ask for his needs adequately or to praise God in Hebrew without it being mixed with other languages. When Ezra and his council understood this, they instituted the eighteen benedictions in proper order: The first three consist of praises of God, the last three consist of thanksgiving, and the intermediate ones contain requests for the things that serve as the principal desires of all individuals and the needs of all communities. This was done so that [the prayers] would be

18. Mendelssohn was restating San. 21b; see above, pp. 254–55.

19. Meg. 3a; see above, pp. 257, 265.

20. The ideas and formulations here were drawn from Maimonides' *Mishneh Torah*, which was then cited directly below; see Tefillah I:3.

> properly arranged in everyone's mouth, that they would learn them, and that the prayer of those with inarticulate speech would be as perfect as those in possession of clear language.

However, when the Greeks came to rule over them the [Jews] quickly turned away and abandoned Aramaic as well, for they always learned the language of the nation that ruled and governed them. Some of them mixed and confused those languages and did not adhere to either one of them properly, and so they also forgot the Aramaic translation that Ezra and his supporters had prepared for them; or it became confused and muddled with the admixture of languages and was thereby corrupted. [This was the situation] until Onqelos the proselyte—who lived in the days of R. Eliezer and R. Joshua, the students of R. Johanan b. Zakai, after the destruction of the [second] Temple—restored the Aramaic translation that had been forgotten by them. And so the Sages said °(Meg. 3a):

> R. Jeremiah—some say it was R. Hiyya b. Abba—said: the *Targum* of the Pentateuch was composed by Onqelos the proselyte at the behest of R. Eliezer and R. Joshua. The Talmud questioned this: Was the *Targum* really composed by Onqelos the proselyte? R. Ikka b. Abin said in the name of R. Hananel who said in the name of Rav: what is [the meaning of] the verse *They read from the book, the law of God, explicated; making it intelligible, they understood the reading* (Neh. 8:8)? *They read from the book, the law of God*—this refers to Scripture; *explicated* [*meforash*] refers to *Targum*; *making it intelligible* refers to the [demarcation of] verses; and *they understood the reading*—this refers to the punctuation [indicated] by means of the cantillation, or some say that it refers to the masoretic traditions. The Talmud responded: It had been forgotten and then restored to them.

After Onqelos, there appeared another convert, a Greek, named *ʿAqilas*,[21] or Aquila, from the island of Pontus in the Mediterranean. He too translated the Torah in the presence of R. Eliezer and R. Joshua [but] in Greek. And thus it appears in the Palestinian Talmud in the first chapter of Megillah, [regarding the Mishnaic statement]:[22] "Rabban Simeon b. Gamliel said: [The Sages] allowed for Scripture to be written only in Greek." [To this, the Talmud commented:] "Said R. Hiyya: Aqilas the proselyte translated the Torah in the presence of R. Eliezer and Rabbi, and [they] praised him and said: *you are the most beautiful among men* (Ps. 45:3)."[23] The author of *Imre Binah* °(chapter 45) wrote that "this was an apt compliment, since the [Sages] attributed the term beauty [*yofi*] to the Greek language, to which they referred in the first chapter of Megillah as the

21. His name appeared in this form in rabbinic and medieval texts, and Mendelssohn maintained the distinction between the Hebraicized and Latinized forms of his name throughout.

22. M. Meg. 1:8.

23. P. Meg. 1:9. Mendelssohn's citation varied somewhat from extant texts.

beauty of Japhet."[24] He went on at length with correct and decisive proofs drawn from various rabbinic passages that Aqilas was not [to be confused with] Onqelos and that the translation of Aqilas was in Greek, which was the language of his nation. This was not as some authors thought, namely that the names Aqilas and Onqelos refer to one and the same person.[25] See that entire chapter [of *Me'or 'Enayim*]. Even today we have a Greek translation of the entire Torah attributed to Aquila of Pontus, and the Sages had mentioned that Aqilas was from Pontus in *Torat Kohanim* to the pericope *Be-Har Sinai*:[26] "*in your land* (Lev. 25:7)—[the produce of the sabbatical year] that is in your land may be eaten, but not what Aqilas took out [of the land] to his slaves in Pontus." They mentioned there that after they warned him about this he refrained from doing it; he no longer removed [sabbatical] produce [whose consumption is] prohibited outside of the Land of Israel, for he heeded the words of the Sages.[27] It may be that the intention of R. Eliezer and R. Joshua [in supporting Aqilas' translation] was to benefit those individuals from among the Jewish multitude who did not know Aramaic and who made use of Greek; as such, [they] instructed that scholar, who had mastered Hebrew and spoke fluently in Greek, to translate the Torah for them into the language of his people, just as Onqelos the proselyte had done earlier in Aramaic.

Jonathan b. Uzziel was among the students of Hillel the elder in the eighth century of the fourth millennium, about a hundred years before the destruction of the Second Temple. The Sages said that he translated the books of the prophets "from the mouth of Haggai, Zechariah, and Malachi."[28] What they meant by this was explained by R. Samuel Edels in his *Ḥidushe Aggadot*, namely that he had received that Aramaic translation from those prophets by way of his teachers, "for he certainly did not meet those prophets who lived in the early years of the Second Temple."[29] The Sages did not mention anything regard-

24. *Me'or 'Enayim*, 146b; the rabbinic reference to Megillah is Meg. 9b, alluding to Gen. 9:27.

25. Among others, this view was held by Mendelssohn's teacher, R. David Fraenkel: see his commentary, *Qorban ha-'Edah*, on P. Meg. 1:9.

26. Sifra, *Be-Har* 1:9.

27. This reference to Aqilas' "repentance" is not found in Sifra or other rabbinic texts. Mendelssohn's source was *Me'or 'Enayim*, 145b, which read: "Even though this is somewhat of a denigration of him . . . one might say in his defense that after they warned him he refrained from doing it." De' Rossi never directly claimed a rabbinic source for his defense, but Mendelssohn appears to have misread "one might say" as "they said" and thus attributed the vindication of Aqilas to the Sages.

28. Meg. 3a. The tradition that he was a student of Hillel is attested in A.R. 14:1.

29. R. Edels (1555–1631) wrote extensive novellae to the Talmud including the sections on aggadot; see his commentary loc. cit. Mendelssohn's citation of R. Edels served as a veiled response to Eichhorn (see below, p. 279, and n. 31), who had taken the rabbinic "fable" stating that Jonathan b. Uzziel received the translation from the late prophets at face value. Eichhorn noted with mocking incredulity that this made him about three hundred years old when he studied with Hillel, and added that "one needs to be a Jew in order to find this pretension believable."

ing an Aramaic translation of his to the Pentateuch, suggesting that he did not translate the Pentateuch at all even though he lived long before Onqelos; and R. Edels wrote in *Ḥidushe Aggadot* that "Jonathan did not consider explicating the Pentateuch." See his commentary for the reason.[30] Hence, the Targum [to the Pentateuch] that is attributed to Jonathan b. Uzziel is not from that early figure, but possibly from someone else of that name, an individual who lived long after the destruction of the Second Temple. This can be shown [to be the case] by a number of proofs, since that translator mentions things that were not yet known in those days, as for example [the place names] *girmania* and *tarqe*, [referring to] Germany and Turkey °(Gen. 10:2), the six orders of the Mishnah °(Ex. 26:9), [and a city named] *qostantine* °(Num. 24:19), even though it is known that the Emperor Constantine only named the city after himself three hundred years after the destruction of the Temple, and that its original name was *Byzanz* [Byzantium]. He mentioned *lombardia* (Num. 24:24), although the Lombards did not battle the people residing in Italy until 600 years after the destruction and a number of generations after Hillel the elder.[31] [This is the correct view,[32]] unless one would say that [the translator] wrote this from the mouth of Haggai, Zechariah, and Malachi, as the Sages mentioned with regard to his translation of the Prophets.[33]

Likewise, anyone with refined taste will sense the great difference between the clear language of the Targum to the Prophets and the language containing an admixture of several foreign words in the Targum to the Pentateuch attributed to Jonathan ben Uzziel. [The author of this Targum] also did not follow the earlier translators in translating the primary intended meaning of Scripture according to its *peshaṭ*, but added to the words of Scripture and expanded it with explanations and *derashot* and allusions. The reader will thus weary of trying to determine what Moses said and what was added by Jonathan. This was not the approach of Onqelos the proselyte, nor that of Jonathan b. Uzziel in his translation of the Prophets, nor of other translators that remain from that era. Onqelos

30. R. Edels based his view on the ensuing Talmudic discussion and suggested that Jonathan distinguished between the Pentateuch, whose meaning he saw as relatively clear and self-evident, and the Prophets, which contained some obscure and esoteric material.

31. Almost all the particulars cited here were provided by Eichhorn in his *Einleitung*, 1:415 (§ 232), and since such proofs for the separate authorship and late dating of Targum Jonathan did not appear in earlier Jewish texts, there can be little doubt that Eichhorn was the immediate source. By the same token it should be noted that Mendelssohn ignored Eichhorn's other argument: that the far-fetched readings incorporated into this Targum could only have come from the impoverished rabbinic minds of later generations.

32. I.e., the translation is the work of a later scholar, possibly with the same name.

33. Mendelssohn's tone and intent here were unclear. He may have been simply suggesting that since the translation was attributed to the late prophets, one could say that these details were known through prophecy. But he may also have been writing facetiously, stating that the alternative to the common-sense explanation of R. Edels was to take the Sages literally, as if prophets would really be alluding to such details.

in particular did not deviate from the primary intended *peshaṭ* meaning, except when it was absolutely compelling for him to do so in the interests of [rendering] the true sense or in order to remove any stumbling block where one might err. And even though in his Targum to the Prophets Jonathan b. Uzziel was a little expansive and added to Scripture, sometimes with additional commentary, there is still no comparison with the [translation of] Jonathan b. Uzziel to the Pentateuch. [The latter] only attended to the Scriptural *peshaṭ* in a few instances and most often included *dersahot* and legends; and even though they are true, the translator should not include them with the sacred words of the Torah. This is especially so if, in his days, there was no *peshaṭ* translation of the Pentateuch, for the translation of Ezra and the Men of the Great Assembly was forgotten at the end of that era, as we mentioned.

From all this it appears that the Targum [to the Pentateuch] found in our printed books is not of Jonathan b. Uzziel, the student of Hillel, but of a later scholar of the same name. More likely, it appears that it is [the same as] the *Targum Yerushalmi* printed with it; there were two copies of that Targum, and where the two texts coincided the printers omitted the *Targum Yerushalmi* and only included those passages where the versions differed. For this reason you find that at times the *Targum Yerushalmi* does not translate an entire pericope but only one or two verses, and sometimes even half a verse or one word. You will find that it always agrees with the translation of Jonathan b. Uzziel in meaning, and differs [only] with respect to the formulation. This is due to what I mentioned, that they are two different versions of one book. Something of a further proof to this is that all earlier authors—the author of the *ʿArukh*, R. Alfasi,[34] and Ramban—referred to that Targum as the *Targum Yerushalmi* or *Targum Ereṣ Yisraʾel*. Only Recanati[35] cites Jonathan b. Uzziel to several verses of the Pentateuch and the *Targum Yerushalmi* to a few [other] verses, as was explicitly mentioned by the author of *Imre Binah* °(chapter 9).[36] That author, R. Azaryiah, saw two manuscripts of the Targum to the Pentateuch that were identical, word for word; one of them was identified as the Targum of Jonathan b. Uzziel, and the second as *Targum Yerushalmi*. It appears that scribes copying [the latter] found the acronym *tav*"*yud*; some of them labeled it *Targum Yehonatan* [Jonathan], and some as *Targum Yerushalmi*.[37] But they are one and the same, written by a Jewish scholar something like six hundred years after the destruction of the Temple at the earliest °(for [only] then were the Lombards and the Turks widely known in

34. R. Isaac Alfasi (1013–1103) was a Moroccan Talmudist and author of an early halakhic compendium.

35. R. Menahem Recanati (1250–1310) was an Italian scholar who penned a commentary on the Pentateuch.

36. *Meʾor ʿEnayim*, 50b.

37. This suggestion regarding the source of the confusion, later repeated by Leopold Zunz and then others, appears to have originated here in Mendelssohn's discussion.

the world). [The author of this Aramaic translation] was familiar with Targum Onqelos, which followed the Scriptural *peshaṭ*, but [the former] chose a different approach. He wanted to convey the cherished *derashot* and the precious legends that appeared in rabbinic *midrashim* in order to arouse the heart of one reading the Torah, *to grasp* the *peshaṭ, and also not to remove his hand from* the derash, *for one who fears God will do his duty by both* (Ecc. 7:18). I know that one can refute these arguments, given that in these matters there is no categorical approach, in addition to which they are not addressed by the tradition. Every Jew is permitted to choose what is correct and good in his eyes in line with his opinion and thinking. I wrote what appears to be true to me.

The above-mentioned Aqilas was not the first Greek translator, for the well-known Septuagint was already extant in his days, as were other translations in that language. The Sages recounted the story of the translation[38] on the part of the elders at the behest of Ptolemy the king in the first chapter of Megillah °(9a):

> It is taught: A story of Ptolemy the king who gathered seventy-two elders and placed them in seventy-two houses without revealing why he had brought them together. He went to each of them individually and said "Write down the Torah of Moses your Master for me." The Holy One, blessed be He, filled the heart of each of them with discernment and they all acceded to one notion[39] and wrote for him: *God created in the beginning* (Gen. 1:1) °(Rashi and the Tosafists explained that this was so that they [= the gentiles] should not say that there are two [divine] powers, that *bere'shit* is [a separate divine entity] doing the action, and that which is being acted upon is *elohim*);[40] *I will make man in an image and likeness* (Gen. 1:26); *on the sixth day* [*God finished*] . . . *and rested on the seventh* (Gen. 2:2); *male and female he created him* (Gen. 5:2); *I will go down and confuse their speech* (Gen. 11:7); *and Sarah laughed with her kin* (Gen. 18:12); *in their anger they slew oxen, and in their wantonness they maimed men* (Gen. 49:6); *he had them ride in a carriage* (Ex. 4:20); *they lived in Egypt and in other lands four hundred and thirty years* (Ex. 12:40); *he sent nobles of the Israelites* (Ex. 24:5); *and to the nobles of the Israelites* (Ex. 24:11); *not one desirable object* (Num. 16:15); *that the Eternal allotted to give light to all the peoples*

38. *ma'aseh ha-pitron*. Mendelssohn used this phrase here on account of its appearance in *Me'or 'Enayim*, 45b, at the beginning of ch. 7, where de' Rossi discussed the origins of the Greek translation. In her edition of that book, Joanna Weinberg suggested that the term *pitron* was used in the sense of the Latin *interpretatio*, which can mean both interpretation and translation. See Azariah de' Rossi, *The Light of the Eyes*, trans. Joanna Weinberg (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2001), 160. Given Mendelssohn's argument below, he might have used the phrase to elicit the same semantic range.

39. That is, they independently arrived at the same notion of how to translate the Pentateuch.

40. Rashi explained that the verse could be misconstrued to mean that a divine power called *bere'shit* created a second divine entity named *elohim*. Tosafot dismissed the idea that the word *bere'shit* could be taken as a noun, and suggested instead that the issue was word order: since the Greeks would have expected the verse (and hence the Bible) to begin by mentioning God first, they would be led to believe that the verse was pointing to two divine powers, *bere'shit* and *elohim*.

(Deut. 4:19); *and he went and served other gods . . . that I have forbidden to worship* (Deut. 17:3); and instead of [*these you shall not eat . . .*] *the hare* [*ha-ʾarnevet*] (Lev. 11:6) they wrote *the small-legged creature* since the wife of Ptolemy was named *arnevet*; [so they changed the word] lest Ptolemy say "the Jews have mocked me by writing my wife's name in the Torah."

This [legend] appeared in Mekhilta in the pericope *Bo* °(section 14) and also cited in tractate Soferim with some small change in the textual formulation.[41] From the words of the Sages it appears that the elders wrote out the Torah for the king in Hebrew as well as its translation in Greek, for if they had written the translation alone they would not have had to alter [the traditional wording] *In the beginning God created*, given that the Greek would not have yielded that error, as is known to every beginner [in that language].[42] And likewise, they would not have had to change the word *arnevet* due to the fact that Ptolemy's wife was named *arnevet*—or, in the version of the first chapter of Megillah in the Palestinian Talmud, that it was Ptolemy's mother who had that name—for the name of that animal in Greek was *lagós*;[43] unless one suggests that they were also afraid to write *lagós* for the same reason, since the father of the king was called Ptolomaeus Lâgos.

Aristeas the Greek composed an entire work in Greek concerning that translation, and it was rendered by Azariah de' Rossi into a clear and polished Hebrew; he titled the work *Hadrat Zeqenim* [The Splendor of the Elders], and it formed the second part of his precious book, *Meʾor ʿEnayim*, which was printed in Mantua in 1574. According to that Greek legend, Ptolemy Philadephus was roused by Demetrius of Phalerium, the official appointed by the king over the great study hall in Alexandria of Egypt, to include the Law of the Jews in the magnificent library wherein he had collected almost 500,000 works. That king proclaimed liberty to all the Jews in his land and gave ransom money on their behalf and sent a great and precious gift to Eleazar the high priest in Jerusalem. [The king] requested of him to send men of distinction, six from each tribe, who would know how to translate the Torah into Greek. And so he did. That Greek author told at length of all the precious [things] that were done for the translators at the behest of the king. He mentioned that they had the divine Torah

41. This comment regarding the textual variants of this rabbinic passage was a one-line summarization of the discussion in *Meʾor ʿEnayim*, 45b. Mendelssohn's citation of the passage followed de' Rossi and thus differed slightly from those rabbinic sources.

42. Mendelssohn, like other Jewish scholars, noted that the Septuagint did not contain most of the biblical alterations attested in the rabbinic sources. In the case of Gen. 1:1, the Greek *en archē epoiēsen o theos* corresponded perfectly to the biblical *bereʾshit bara elohim*, and it left little philological or syntactical room for theological error. As a solution to this problem, Mendelssohn suggested that the Hebrew text must have been submitted alongside the Greek translation, and since the Hebrew version was open to misinterpretation it was altered and then translated accordingly.

43. In other words, Greek readers of the translation would not have encountered the word *arnevet* and any perceived slight.

written on scrolls in gilt lettering, and that they were segregated on an isolated island, and that they completed the translation in seventy-two days. This was the arrangement they followed: each one of them translated every portion of the Torah by himself, and afterwards they would match all the translations, and the most suitable version acceptable to them all was written down by the above-mentioned Demetrius, the king's guardian of the books.[44] If we believe the words of this Greek [i.e., Aristeas], he himself was in Alexandria at that time, present at that event and recording his story from the king's chroniclers. The Latin Josephus[45] °(book XII, § 2 of the *Antiquities*) and Yedidyah the Alexandrian known as Philo[46] also related that event in the same way as the above-mentioned Aristeas, with some modification and abridgement of the words, such that it appears that they took most of their words from that Greek text.

Know that in the view of recent writers, the words of that author are suspected of being fabricated, falsified, and embellished, and they said that his words contradict each other and are contrary to better known and accepted accounts.[47] Other writers have risen to his defense and upheld his testimony, and assertions in all directions have multiplied. It appears that one cannot refute the testimony of ancient [writers] in this matter, particularly the testimony of Philo who was a resident of Alexandria itself—the very city in which that translation was done—some three hundred years after those elders, and the testimony of some Christian scholars who lived at the time of the early Tannaim, since they all agree with the general aspects of Aristeas' story, even if they diverge in the details. It is well known that with regard to chronicles a divergence in detail on the part of the narrators does not harm the reliability of the general [story], as the author of *Imre Binah* stated in chapter seven; [there] he detailed the agreement and divergences in the words of ancient writers on this subject. He wrote further:

> You should not find it difficult that the Sages wrote that Ptolemy gathered them together but did not inform them of the reason, whereas from the writings of

44. This last line is taken almost verbatim from *Me'or 'Enayim*, 26a.

45. Mendelssohn followed Azariah de' Rossi in distinguishing the writings of Josephus, the Roman-Jewish author of *Antiquities*, and the unknown author of the Hebrew *Yosippon*, the medieval Hebrew chronicle attributed to Joseph ben Gorion, and referred to as the Hebrew Josephus.

46. Yedidyah means "the beloved of God." Here too, Mendelssohn used the name assigned by de' Rossi, the latter having effectively rediscovered Philo and his writings for early modern Jews.

47. Chief among early modern scholars skeptical of the letter were Joseph Scaliger and Humphrey Hody, but the spirited debate they engendered had largely quieted by the early eighteenth century and writers of Mendelssohn's generation added little to those earlier discussions. Eichhorn referred to Aristeas as a *Romanschreiber* and regarded the *Letter* with due wariness; see "Ueber die Quellen, aus denen die verschiedenen Erzählungen von der Entstehung der alexandrinschen Uebersetzung geflossen sind," *Repertorium für Biblische und Morgenländische Literatur* 1 (1777): 266–80; and Eichhorn, *Einleitung*, 1:50 (§ 24), and 286–88 (§ 161).

> the narrators we learn that he already informed them of the reason he would gather them when he wrote to Eleazar the high priest. [This poses no difficulty,] because in their desire for brevity the Sages properly focused on what was being conveyed—that after the elders came to him he separated them so that they could not confer. This is as if he had not informed them why they were invited.[48]

Likewise, if the Sages wrote that the Holy One, blessed be He, put one notion in their hearts, while the Greek [author] wrote that they would coordinate the translations and select the one most proper and acceptable to all of them; this too, in my opinion, contains no contradiction. For according to the testimony of Aristeas, the [elders] conferred in the presence of Demetrius, the custodian of the library, and joined in [discussion] regarding the translation, and that scholar would listen to their words and deliberated with them. Thus, in those instances that they changed the words of Scripture, God performed a miracle and they agreed to one opinion so that [Demetrius] would not suspect their words as being fabricated. Nevertheless, it is possible that they diverged in the explanation of the intended meaning of Scripture and the syntactical reading,[49] or in choosing the turn of phrase that is most suitable in Greek, such that they contended with upright claims and proofs until the one with the best [argument] prevailed; on account of this, [Demetrius] did not suspect them of being deceitful. It is more likely that had they agreed word for word without any divergence whatsoever, he would have regarded them suspiciously, for he would not believe *that the hand of the Eternal did this* (Isa. 41:20), and with human activity such exacting agreement is impossible were it not that they consulted and conferred. He would have determined that they had spoken with one another, or that the translation was familiar and well known to all even before the king's command reached them.

In the first chapter of tractate Soferim, the Sages mentioned another Greek translation prepared at the behest of Ptolemy before the above-mentioned event with the seventy-two elders. They said: "It once happened that five elders wrote the Torah for King Ptolemy in Greek, and that day was as ominous for Israel as the day that the golden calf was made, since the Torah could not be adequately translated."[50] After this they wrote "Another occurrence with Ptolemy the king who assembled seventy-two elders, etc." From the words of Demetrius, the custodian of the library, and his request to Ptolemy Philadelphus as written in the beginning of *Hadrat Zeqenim* it is likewise implied that a few portions of the Torah had been translated earlier, but that the translation was inaccurate and insufficient. This was also attested by Aristobulus the Jew, as [other] writers have written in his name. °(This Aristobulus wrote a large treatise in Greek,

48. *Me'or 'Enayim*, 47b.
49. *ṭe'amim*.
50. Soferim 1:7.

comprising 100 chapters, on the Law of Moses for King Ptolemy, known as Ptolemy Philometor. This was lost due to the length of time that had elapsed, and only small sections cited in the writings of others remain. The author of *Imre Binah* heard that the work can be found in the library in Florence.) These are his words in the second chapter [of the book written] for Ptolemy: "Plato adhered to the approach of the Law of Moses with regard to many things, given that it is clearly evident that he understood many of its details. This was [possible] because the Mosaic books were translated before Demetrius, and even before Alexander and before the Persian dynasty. They took many things from it, as did the philosopher Pythagoras."[51] However, it was not translated completely until the days of King Ptolemy, known as Philadelphus, when this was eagerly undertaken by Demetrius at the behest of the king.

Know that the magnificent study hall in Alexandria belonging to the kings of Egypt where the above-mentioned translation of the seventy elders was preserved, was burned entirely when they chased after Pompey who had fled there to take refuge under Cleopatra's protection.[52] The chroniclers of Rome said that more than 700,000 books were lost in that fire.

If indeed the Greek translation found in our hands today and known as the Septuagint came from those elders and was saved from the fire that consumed that edifice, one must conclude that the translation has already been corrected, for only four of the thirteen alterations mentioned by the Sages in Megillah and in Soferim are found therein. They are: *on the sixth day* [*God finished*] . . . *and rested on the seventh* (Gen. 2:2); *he had them ride in a carriage* (Ex. 4:20); *they lived in Egypt and in other lands four hundred and thirty years* (Ex. 12:40); *not one desirable object* (Num. 16:15). The rest are absent. However, one finds instead an unfathomable number of variants and divergences, which were mentioned by the author of *Imre Binah* in the eighth chapter of his work. Moreover, that translation also includes the Prophets and Writings, and from the words of our Sages it seems that the elders wrote the Mosaic Law alone. One must thus conclude that other translators added the Prophets and Writings. And so it appears; anyone who has the ability to understand the pleasing quality of Greek knows that the language of the translation in the Mosaic Law is more sublime and superior to the translation to the other books [of Scripture], and they are therefore from a different author. With regard to the many discrepancies in words, vocalization and the cantillation that appear in the translation of the elders that we have in our possession,[53] Azariah suggested in his above-mentioned book that [when] the elders [came to translate the Torah they] did not bring with them the Torah scrolls in Hebrew, but rather the Aramaic translation that they had from

51. The note regarding Aristobulus and the quote are from *Me'or 'Enayim*, 52a.
52. Ibid., 49b.
53. I.e., the manifold ways in which the Greek translation diverged from the masoretic text.

the days of Ezra and his supporters, which was in the hands of the multitude and well known among them. For the sanctified and excellent language [i.e., Hebrew] was only known to a few individuals, while all Jews employed either Aramaic or Greek, as we mentioned. That Targum contained many variants and divergences that befell it from the time that Ezra the Scribe composed it until that [Alexandrian] period, which extended more than a century. However, since it was accepted and [deemed] worthy among the great multitude of Jews living then in Alexandrian Egypt, they thought that it would please the king to translate the Torah according to the [Targum], and they did not alter that Aramaic translation except for the thirteen items mentioned by the Sages; all the rest was left as they found it. This was the idea proposed by the scholar Azariah cited above.[54] If so, it is possible that the Samaritans wrote the Torah that they possess from that altered and muddled version of the translation, and for this reason most of its words are consistent with the Septuagint that we have in our possession. I have already informed you above that most of the differences and alterations of the Samaritan version emerged from the transposition of similar letters in Hebrew script.

In the beginning of the eighth century of the fifth millennium,[55] R. Saadya Gaon b. Joseph the Pitomite ʿ(this is based on the name of his city Pitom in the district of Fayyum in Egypt)[56] translated the Pentateuch into Arabic, and there are those who also attribute to him the translation of the Prophets and Writings.[57] Whenever Ibn Ezra mentioned "the Gaon" in his commentary on the Torah, as when he writes that [the Gaon] translated such and such in the language of Ishmael, he was referring to the Gaon R. Saadya and this Arabic translation.[58] He referred to Arabic as the language of Ishmael since the translation of Onqelos renders *a caravan of Ishmaelites* ʿ(Gen. 37:25) as "a caravan of Arabs." All the princes and scholars of that people speak the magnificent language of the Arabs to this day, and they wrote all their religious texts, their prayers, and scientific books in that language, as is known. In those days, the scholars of our nation who dwelled under the rule of that people also used Arabic for its clarity and pleasing quality, and wrote their books in it—not only books of science and ethics, or belles-lettres and poetry, but also [Jewish] law, Mishnah commentaries, and Talmudic novellae, as is known from the books of R. Saadya

54. *Meʾor ʿEnayim*, 52b.

55. I.e., the middle of the tenth century.

56. Saadya had identified Fayyum with the biblical Pitom of Ex. 1:11.

57. Mendelssohn did not read Arabic and did not have first-hand knowledge of Saadya's translation, but relied on scholarly discussions of Arabic and Judeo-Arabic translations of the Pentateuch. These included Walton's *Biblia Sacra Polyglotta*, 1, Prolegomena, XIV:93–97; Edward Pocock's Preface to the Arabic variants in ibid., 6:1–2; and J.C. Wolf, *Bibliotheca Hebraea* (1715) 1: 932–36. Eichhorn's *Einleitung*, 1:486–502 (§ 276–83) drew upon these same studies, and Mendelssohn sometimes used it as his immediate source.

58. See, e.g., Ibn Ezra to Gen. 2:11–12.

Gaon, Maimonides, R. Bahya,[59] the author of *Kuzari*, and the novellae cited in *Shiṭṭah Mequbbeṣet* that were copied from Arabic.[60] There thus arose a need at that time to translate the Torah in the language that was widely recognized and familiar. That Arabic translation was published in Constantinople in 1546 with the [Hebrew] Pentateuch, Onqelos, and a Persian translation of R. Jacob b. Joseph Tavus in block Hebrew letters.[61] The [editors of the] Paris Polyglot that we mentioned earlier also printed this translation of R. Saadya from a manuscript that they obtained that was consistent with the translation of R. Saadya printed in 1546; they were akin to two versions copied from one text, and any discrepancy was due either to scribes who now and then added, deleted, or altered [the text] on their own account, or because of errors in transcription. That translation was then used in the Polyglot published in London.

Confirmation that this translation is from Saadya Gaon is that all the passages cited by Ibn Ezra in the name of the Gaon are found in both those versions. The scribe who copied this manuscript said in his introduction that the translator was a Christian monk by the name of Said from the province of Fayyum, but there is no doubt that he erred or purposely altered the similar-sounding name of the Gaon R. Saadya of Fayyum.[62] Now, this Gaon did not translate the Torah literally but expanded upon the [biblical] phrases and added exegetical comments in line with the traditional rabbinic understanding, as he himself attested in his introduction: "One who delves into this commentary of mine should consider each and every word that I added or omitted and should understand what is intended by it; one would thereby grasp a number of questions and solutions that serve as the foundation of the laws adduced in the Mishnah and Talmud and other teachings of tradition."[63] The printed version of his translation also contained mistakes and discrepancies that even a school-child would not make, and there is no doubt that they result from notions that the scribe inserted of his own accord. For example, *am I in place* [*ha-taḥat*] *of God*? °(Gen. 50:19) is

59. R. Bahya ibn Paquda.

60. This work was a sixteenth-century compendium of Talmudic commentaries and novellae compiled by R. Beṣalel Ashkenazi of Egypt.

61. This Pentateuch, often referred to as the first Jewish Polyglot Bible, was published by Eleazar Soncino.

62. This point was made by Eichhorn, *Einleitung*, 1:491–93 (§ 279).

63. There existed no Hebrew translation of Saadya's commentary in the eighteenth century. Mendelssohn's source for this quote was Pocock's Latin translation of these lines that appeared in Walton's *Biblia Sacra Polyglotta*; see above n. 57. The same brief Latin quote was cited in Eichhorn, *Einleitung*, 1:495 (§ 280). Note that the Arabic original of Saadya's text used by Pocock differed somewhat from the versions used today, and gave Mendelssohn a different, possibly distorted view of the nature of the Arabic translation. While extant versions stress Saadya's desire to offer a straightforward translation with only the most minimal and allusive reference to issues of tradition, Mendelssohn's impression was that of a translation that went out of its way to incorporate rabbinic readings.

translated[64] *Ich fürchte Gott* as if Scripture were written "I am subservient to [*taḥat*] God";[65] and similarly, [*the man*] *marveled* [*at her*] °(Gen. 24:21) was translated *zu trinken verlangt* [(the man) asked (her) to drink];[66] and *treat as first-born* [*le-vakker*] °(Deut. 21:16) was translated *vorziehen* [to prefer] as if Scripture had *le-khabed*.[67] The Gaon's translation printed in the polyglots of Paris and London also contained a number of [textual] discrepancies not found in the abovementioned first printing of 1546, and they made their way into the [polyglot versions] from the Septuagint or the Samaritan Pentateuch. But the Gaon was not party to those [insertions], and one should not rely upon them at all. If you wish to know how far scribal presumptuousness extends, consider the examples of those changes in Eichhorn's introduction to the Pentateuch °(*Einleitung in das Alte Testament* von Johann Gottlieb Eichhorn, Professor zu Jena, Leipzig 1780), for these things have been taken from there.[68]

In 1547 a Pentateuch with a Spanish[69] and [a] Greek[70] translation was printed in Constantinople; its authorship is not known.[71] The rabbis of Ferrara examined that [Spanish] translation and were careful to render it such that it corresponded word for word with [Hebrew] Scripture; they had it printed by Yom Tov Athias in that city in 1553.[72] It was printed a third time with excellent editing in 1630 by Menasseh b. Israel in Amsterdam. It was subsequently printed many times, by the same Menasseh in 1644 and 1656, and also by Samuel de Caceres in the publishing house of Joseph Athias, Amsterdam, 1661,[73] and by

64. As should be obvious, Mendelssohn supplied a German rendition of the Arabic translation.

65. Mendelssohn's citation of this example is rather curious, given that Onqelos offered the same reading of the passage.

66. In this instance, the biblical context could sustain both readings.

67. As Mendelssohn acknowledged just below, the three examples offered here are all cited from Eichhorn, *Einleitung*, 1:494–95 (§ 280). Mendelssohn, however, subverted Eichhorn's point, for the latter had offered these readings to underscore Saadya's independence vis-à-vis the biblical text, that is, his willingness to eschew problematic and possibly corrupted words preserved in the traditional text. By citing these very same examples and dismissing them as scribal insertions easily recognizable to any school-age child, Mendelssohn was making a rather pointed comment regarding Eichhorn's approach.

68. See Eichhorn, *Einleitung*, 1: 498–502 (§ 282–83). Eichhorn was of the view that even the Constantinople edition had such interpolations, a point that Mendelssohn did not address.

69. *sefaradi* °(*Spanisch*); since Mendelssohn did not explicitly identify this language as Judeo-Spanish, i.e., Ladino or Judezmo, it has been translated according to his own designation. Cf. his use of *leshon ashkenaz*, p. 275 and n. 17, and below.

70. This Greek translation was directed at sixteenth-century Greek-speaking Levantine Jews; it bore no direct connection to the Jewish-Greek translations of late antiquity or the Septuagint.

71. This Pentateuch was also printed by the Soncino family. Both Spanish and Greek translations were printed in vocalized Hebrew letters alongside the masoretic text, Onqelos, and Rashi.

72. Athias published this Spanish translation of the entire Tanakh with Abraham Usque. Its translation differed somewhat from the one printed in the 1547 Pentateuch, and it was published as a free-standing Spanish Bible in Latin letters.

73. These seventeenth-century editions were also free-standing Spanish Bibles; they contained fairly minor, mainly orthographic, emendations of the Ferrara edition.

Isaac Aboab.[74] A decade ago, [this translation] was published by Joseph Proops' esteemed and praiseworthy publishing house in Amsterdam in a folio volume that is the ultimate of beauty and splendor.[75] There is nothing that compares to the magnificent work produced by that publishing house among all the books printed to this day.

The great grammarian Levita translated the Pentateuch and the [Five] Scrolls word for word in German,[76] and it was printed in Constance, Switzerland, in 1544.[77] Later, the [entire] Tanakh was printed in German and Hebrew lettering[78] by the translator Yosel Witzenhausen in Amsterdam, 1679, and this was reprinted there in 1687.[79] Another German translation by Yequtiel Blitz of Wittmund was also printed in Amsterdam in 1679, with approbations and [copyright] restrictions issued by several eminent rabbis of that generation. In his introduction, Yequtiel noted that he had seen the German translation of the Pentateuch printed in Constance; he disparaged it frequently [and proclaimed it] unfit, ultimately deciding that the translation did not emanate from the hand of that Ashkenazi grammarian. Although I have never seen the translation attributed to Levita—it has not circulated in this country at all—I did see the above-mentioned translation of Yequtiel, and I found that he suffers from the same deficiencies that he ascribed to Levita.[80] And although his intentions may have been pleasing—and for this reason the scholars of his generation acceded

74. Isaac Aboab de Fonseca published a Pentateuch in Amsterdam, 1681, but it provided a paraphrase and commentary rather than a straight translation. Mendelssohn might not have had first-hand knowledge of this edition. This list of printed early modern Spanish translations of Scripture was in any event incomplete.

75. *Torah, Nevi'im, u-Khetuvim: Biblia, en dos colunas Hebrayco y Español* (Amsterdam, 1772). This edition was actually a reprint of the Proops 1762 edition, which contained the Hebrew text and Spanish translation in parallel columns. The Spanish text was largely faithful to that of the earlier Ferrara Bible.

76. *leshon ashkenaz*; see above, p. 275 and n. 17; given the importance of the terminology in light of Mendelssohn's broader presentation, it bears repeating that Mendelssohn consistently used the term *leshon ashkenaz* to refer to both the Germanic vernacular of early modern Ashkenazic Jewry and his own *Hochdeutsch*. The translation of *leshon ashkenaz* as German is thus intended to reflect and maintain Mendelssohn's perspective.

77. The attribution of this translation to Levita is erroneous; this edition was published by a Jewish convert by the name of Michael Adam, who seems to have made use of extant translations. Mendelssohn was seemingly misled by the same information that initially reached Yequtiel Blitz (see below) and the bibliographical work of Shabbetai Bass, *Sifte Yeshanim* (Amsterdam, 1680), 86. Mendelssohn seemed unaware of—or ignored—the more accurate information provided in Wolf, *Bibliotheca Hebraea*, 2:455, 4:191–93.

78. *otiyyot 'ivriyot*, as opposed to *ketav meruba*. Like the other German translations mentioned here, this one was printed not in square Hebrew letters, but in a kind of semi-cursive lettering referred to variously as *mashait*, *mashqit*, or more popularly, *vaybertaytsh*. Mendelssohn referred here to Hebrew lettering in order to juxtapose it to the Latin script commonly used in the printed Spanish translations.

79. The translator was Joseph b. Alexander Witzenhausen.

80. *posel be-mumo*, a rabbinic phrase more literally rendered "he declares others unfit with his own blemishes."

on his behalf—his actions were not pleasing at all,[81] for he did not discern the qualities of Hebrew and did not understand the profundity of its refined expressions. And what he did [manage to] grasp he translated in a deficient and garbled *language of stammerers*, and a reader who knows how to *speak eloquently* (Isa. 32:4) will loathe it.

Since then, and to this day, *no one has taken to heart to correct this distortion* (Isa. 57:1, Ecc. 1:15) and to translate the Holy Torah in the articulate language that is current and familiar in our generation. Jewish children wanting to *understand words of discernment run to and fro seeking the word of God* (Prov. 1:2, Amos 8:12) from the translations of Christian scholars. For Christians translate the Torah in each and every generation, *according to their languages, in their nations* (Gen. 10:20) in keeping with contemporary need, linguistic articulateness, and the euphony of its expressions; they sometimes [translated] in line with the words, and other times in line with the intended meaning; sometimes word for word, and sometimes with elaboration and added commentary. [All this was done] in order to slake the thirst of students according to *each one's wishes* (Esth. 1:8) and needs.

However, that path upon which many of our nation's youth have tread has many a snare and stumbling block *for those whose feet slip* (Job 12:5), and great harm has emerged from there. For Christian translators—who do not have the traditions of our Sages, and who do not heed the *masorah*, not even accepting the vocalization and cantillation that we have in our possession—treat the words of the Torah like a breached wall, everyone contending against it and doing with it as he pleases. They add and delete and change the divine Torah, not only the vowel points and the cantillation, but sometimes even letters and words °(for who will stem their senselessness?[82]) according to what they think and perceive. As a result, they sometimes read in the Torah not what is written there, but *that which occurs to them* (Ez. 20:32).[83]

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81. Mendelssohn borrowed a line from the opening to Judah ha-Levi's *Kuzari*, wherein the Khazar king reported a recurring dream in which an angel said, "Your intention is pleasing to the Creator, but your actions are not pleasing."

82. Translating *ruaḥ* as per Ecc. 1:14. Mendelssohn made the same point a decade earlier in a private letter to an unnamed Christian scholar. After citing an example of the liberties taken by contemporary Bible scholars (the example appeared in the work of Benjamin Kennicott), Mendelssohn wrote: "I do not know where this audacity will end . . . People [will] eventually lose their taste for it, and then the time comes to lead them back to the path of sound reason." In another letter to this same scholar, Mendelssohn wrote that Kennicott and his followers "treat Scripture in a far too arbitrary manner; they permit themselves liberties with it that modest critics do not even permit themselves with respect to common writers." See *JubA*, 12,2:33–34, 42.

83. A prime example of a popular German translation of Hebrew Scripture that deviated from the masoretic text was Johann David Michaelis, *Deutsche Übersetzung des Alten Testaments mit Anmerkungen für Ungelehrte* (Göttingen und Gotha, 1769–85). In his preface, Michaelis wrote rather baldly that "I rather wish the entire work be discontinued, if I must be obliged

I do not censure those scholars for this [approach], for what should compel them to heed the tradition that they had not received from their ancestors, or [to heed] the *masorah*, which was not transmitted to them from individuals they consider trustworthy? They have not accepted the words of the Torah *to preserve and fulfill all that is written* there (Josh. 23:6) but rather as a book of chronicles, in order to know the events of ancient times and to understand the ways of Providence and divine guidance in every generation. Toward this end, there is no harm done if they occasionally change the details by adding or removing letters or words as they do with prominent and well-known profane books, in which every proofreader inserts changes as he desires. However, while this may be possible for non-Jewish[84] scholars and their disciples, it is not possible for us, the House of Israel. For us the Torah is a heritage,[85] not only for the purpose already mentioned, but to know the Commandment that God charged us with, to study and teach [them], to abide by and do [them],[86] *for it is our sustenance and length of our days* (Deut. 30:20). And in order that our lives not be hanging on the hairbreadth of inference or the thread of observation alone, our Sages established the *masorah* for us and erected a fence for the Torah and for the Commandment, for the decrees and laws, in order that we not grope like the blind in the dark. From this time forward, we are not to move from their paved ways and *chart a path of life* without *accurate scales and balances* (Prov. 5:6, 16:11) on the basis of inference and reasoned suppositions of a grammarian or one who emends of his own accord. We do not live from his mouth; but whatever our trustworthy masters of the *masorah* transmitted to us—so it will be, and so it will stand, and it is by their word that we will *understand the reading*[87] *and make it intelligible* (Neh. 8:8). We shall examine and discern what is written there, sometimes according to its *peshaṭ*, sometimes in accordance with rabbinic *derashot*, for both are equally correct, as I will explain below, with God's help.[88]

When God graced me with sons and the time came to teach them Torah and inculcate them[89] with *the words of the living* God (Jer. 23:36), as is written in Scripture, I ventured to translate the five books of the Pentateuch into a refined

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to follow the beliefs of the Jewish Masoretes . . . which occasionally do not even yield a rational sense"; see 1: xxvii.

84. The first printing of the introductions, apparently mailed to pre-subscribers of *Sefer Netivot ha-Shalom* as a separate booklet, read "Christian scholars." In light of the context, which did not specifically pertain to Christians per se, this was changed to *ḥokhme ha-ʿamim* in the final printed edition.

85. *morashah*, alluding to Deut. 33:4.

86. This phrase is taken from the text of the daily prayers.

87. *miqra*, also intended as a play on the rabbinic use of the word for Scripture.

88. The phrasing recalled the opening lines of his introduction to *Megillat Qohelet*.

89. *le-shannenam*, alluding to Deut. 6:7, where Mendelssohn rendered *ve-shinnantam* as *Du sollst . . . einschärfen*.

and correct German[90] compatible with what is current in our day, for the benefit of the young children. I *put* the translation *in their mouths* (Deut. 31:19) in conjunction with the study of the biblical text,[91] sometimes word for word and sometimes consistent with the intended meaning and the context, in order to instruct them in the meaning of the text, the refined style of the language, and its *purified teaching* (Job 11:4), until they would grow up and understand it of their own accord. God propitiously set before me Our Teacher, Rabbi Solomon of Dubno,[92] may his light shine, to teach what was then my only surviving son[93] °(may God strengthen his heart to serve and fear Him) one hour a day of [Hebrew] grammar. When he saw the Torah translation in my hands, *it found favor in his eyes and seemed proper to him* (Esth. 8:5), and he asked to publish it for the benefit of the students to whom God has granted *the understanding of parables and allusive expressions* (Prov. 1:6). I assented, but on the condition that he be mindful to note every instance in my translation wherein I inclined toward the opinion of one of the earlier exegetes, or where I turned away from all their opinions in order to take a different approach that, in my opinion, was fitting and consistent with the language, the context, or the positioning of the cantillation and its underlying principles; [I asked that] he scrutinize and examine all this and discuss it with me and commit it to paper, and that it serve as a commentary on Scripture in language easily understood by every reader. I also assured him with a faithful promise that I would assist him in the composition and writing of that commentary to the extent I could. I further stipulated that he include my learned brother R. Saul in the printing and proofreading. They would each receive their share of the wages for their labor, aside from the reward due *to those who do what is good and right in the eyes of God* (Deut. 12:28), to magnify the Torah and glorify it;[94] and [the reward for] distancing the minds of Jewish children from the translations of which they availed themselves until now. God *knows and bears witness* (Jer. 29:23) that it did not occur to me, nor did I hope, to attain monetary gain or honor with this work. I did not want to associate my name with it,[95] were it not for [Dubno] asking me to do so as a means of enhancing interest in it as well as [the number of] *those who squander money from their purse* [Isa. 46:6];[96] for the printing expenses were great and his means

90. *leshon ashkenaz*; see above, nn. 17 and 76.

91. The use of the biblical phrase was meaningful in that rabbinic and medieval literature linked it to the pedagogic imperative to nurture a mastery of the biblical text; see, e.g., Eruv. 54b and Ibn Ezra to Deut. 31:19.

92. See the Editors' Introduction to part IV of this work.

93. This was Joseph, born in August 1770. Mendelssohn's eldest son, Mendel, died in September 1775, and Joseph remained the only son until the birth of Abraham in December 1776.

94. A traditional phrase based on Isa. 42:21.

95. Although Mendelssohn signed his name to the introduction and allowed himself to be named in the letters of approbation, he chose to leave his name off the title page.

96. I.e., who would open their pockets to purchase copies of the book.

[of covering expenses] insufficient were it not for the willingness of my noble co-religionists to pre-subscribe [for copies of this work] and to support it.

Dubno agreed to do as I said. He gathered and collected commentaries on the Bible consistent with its *peshaṭ* and its primary intended meaning, [selecting] from the writings of the foremost eminent *peshaṭ* exegetes who serve as our guides in the explication of the Bible. They are: the great luminary Rashi, who is incomparable anywhere he followed the *peshaṭ*; his grandson Rashbam, who delves very deeply into the scriptural *peshaṭ*, sometimes more than is appropriate, such that out of love for the straightforward [reading] he sometimes deviates from the truth;[97] Ibn Ezra, who was expert in all the sciences; and Ramban, who did marvelous things in his commentary on the Torah—his language *delicious and all* his words *delightful* (Song 5:16). Accompanying them is Radaq; although we don't possess his commentary on the Torah, his *Sefer ha-Shorashim* explains many scriptural verses in [the entries for] each individual root.

In every instance in my translation that I chose the interpretation of one exegete over the other, [Dubno] made known my intention and reason, whether I followed the path of the masorete's cantillation, or whether I came to it on account of a grammatical point, or context, or linguistic features in line with the principles that I have set for myself. Likewise, in every instance wherein the *derash* and the *peshaṭ* diverge and are far apart from one another, I sometimes rendered the translation according to the *peshaṭ* alone and sometimes the *derash* alone, and [Dubno] made known my reason for this in his commentary. The principle that we applied with regard to this was to distinguish between something contradictory and divergent. For with regard to things that diverge it is possible that both are equally correct and true, and so wherever the *peshaṭ* deviates and diverges from the *derash* but is not contrary to it, Scripture does not lose its *peshaṭ* interpretation, and the *derashah* is [also] expounded.[98] In that case, the Scriptural *peshaṭ* serves as the primary and principal intended meaning, and the *derashah* is a second meaning that the speaker also intended to express—as is the way of someone who has mastered a language to sometimes aim at different meanings in one utterance; nevertheless, [the *derashah*] is not the principal [meaning] °(see what I wrote on this subject in the introduction to the commentary on Qohelet, published here in 1770). And when the translator who renders the phrase into another language cannot convey[99] both meanings in his translation and conceal the second meaning in the shadow of the primary one as it

97. Cf. Mendelssohn's opening remarks in his *Be'ur* to Ex. 21.

98. *en miqra yoṣe mi-yede peshuṭo*, *ve-ha-derashah tiddaresh*; both phrases were exegetical touchstones of medieval and early modern biblical commentaries.

99. The text has *le-hamtiq*, yielding an awkward reading. There may be a typographical error of one letter, the correct word being *le-ha'atiq* (which is also used later in the paragraph). Mendelssohn's point, in either event, is clear.

appears in the language before us,[100] he must then choose the primary intended *peshaṭ* meaning and not stray to the right or the left, and leave the *derashah* to one who understands the language of the text being translated. However, if what appears to us to be the scriptural *peshaṭ* contradicts and is contrary to the *derush* received and transmitted to us from the Sages such that the two cannot both be correct—given the impossibility of contradictory statements—it is then incumbent upon us to follow the *derush*, and to translate Scripture accordingly. For us—we rely only on the received tradition of our Sages, and *in their light we behold light* (Ps. 36:10).

Dubno also added to this a work [titled] *Tiqqun Soferim*, for he was exceedingly knowledgeable of matters regarding the masoretic tradition—the defective and *plene* [orthography], the grammar, and the underlying principles of the cantillation. He gleaned from *Masoret Seyag la-Torah* of R. Meir ha-Levi Abulafia b. Todros of Toledo °(a friend of Ramban who died in 1244),[101] from *Or Torah* composed by Menahem di Lonzano, and from *Minḥat Shai* of R. Yedidya Solomon Norzi.[102] Those scholars had examined, investigated, and considered each and every word to determine whether it was defective or *plene*; each and every letter [to determine] whether it had a *dagesh forte* or a *dagesh lene*;[103] and each and every cantillation mark[104] to determine whether [the stress fell] on the penultimate or ultimate syllable. Likewise, [they determined] the minuscule and majuscule lettering,[105] upright and inverted letters,[106] the *metagim* and *gaʿyot*,[107] and open and closed [sections of the Torah].[108] They also corrected inaccuracies that appeared in the printed *masorah*[109] by means of masoretic manuscripts that they had obtained, for one cannot rely on the printed *masorah* due to the

100. I.e., in the biblical Hebrew text.

101. This text, written in 1227, was printed for the first time in Florence in 1750, and again in Berlin in 1761.

102. Lonzano (1550–1624) published *Or Torah* in Venice 1618 as a free-standing text; it was published three more times before 1780, and was printed in two early eighteenth-century editions of the Pentateuch. Norzi (1560–1616) did not publish *Minḥat Shai* in his lifetime; it appeared in Mantua 1742 as a gloss to the Tanakh.

103. These were diacritical points added to consonants to determine pronunciation; the *dagesh forte* was used to indicate the germination or doubling of a consonant, while the *dagesh lene* was applied to six consonants to indicate their pronunciation as plosives or fricatives.

104. *neginah*, although Mendelssohn occasionally used it synonymously with *ṭaʿam/ṭeʿamim*.

105. That is, the handful of instances when letters were enlarged (e.g., Lev. 11:42) or shrunken (e.g., Gen. 2:4).

106. This referred to the inverted *nun*s of Num. 10:35–36; see above, p. 242 and n. 8.

107. The *metagim* and *gaʿyot* indicated secondary stress within a word. The two terms are generally used synonymously.

108. These referred to the two kinds of section or paragraph divisions in the masoretic text: those noting the beginning of a new section on a new line (like modern paragraph breaks), and those indicating an empty space (by tradition, nine letters) and the start of a new section on the same line.

109. I.e., the masoretic marginalia printed in the *miqraʾot gedolot*.

manifold mistakes they contain. Who can convey the abundant good that these writers gave us with their books? Were it not for them, the Torah would have almost been lost to Israel;[110] scribes would be unable to write even one section accurately and the reader unable to read one verse correctly, for the printed Bibles have many discrepancies and contain a great many errors. Dubno worked faithfully. He did not rest content with what those authors had done but examined their writings thoroughly and expended considerable effort and toil so as not to produce something inaccurate. He supplemented the work of those three writers with a carefully corrected Tanakh with Rashi's commentary, a manuscript written on parchment in 1489 °(this was a gift from my friend, the communal officer and leader Seligmann of Königsberg);[111] in the margins, there were a few masoretic corrections that had not been printed, and it enabled him to clarify some uncertainties, as the reader will see in the *Tiqqun Soferim* that is before him. He also found in my possession a manuscript with the commentary of Rashi and Rashbam, written in Worms, which came into my possession from the library of the printer Jablonski,[112] who first printed Rashbam's commentary from a copy of that manuscript here in our city in 1705.[113] But the scribe who copied from that manuscript was not expert in that old script and often erred and also sometimes omitted a few lines. Dubno was aided by that manuscript in instances of errors in the printed version of Rashbam's commentary.

I added to Dubno's commentary and explained all the foreign words cited in Rashi's commentary;[114] in this too I was greatly aided by the two manuscripts in my possession, for the foreign words were greatly muddled and distorted in the printed versions, as the reader will see in our commentary. So too, with regard to Rashi's [commentary], I found in those manuscripts straightforward and correct formulations in which I delighted very much. The reader will also delight in them, since [Rashi] will thus be extricated from peculiar and astonishing things that appear in his printed work due to scribal or printers' errors, or from a student who mistook [Rashi's intent] and recorded his suppositions on the [margins of the manuscript] page, which the printers then added to the text

110. On this bit of rabbinic rhetoric, see, e.g., Sukk. 20a.

111. The manuscript is a three-volume illustrated Tanakh on vellum, known today as the Prague Bible and in the possession of the Mendel Gottesman Library of Yeshiva University. Seligmann Joseph (1746–1826) was a wealthy dealer in precious metals and coins in Königsberg; Mendelssohn visited there in the summer of 1777 when plans for this edition of the Pentateuch were underway.

112. Daniel Ernst Jablonski (1660–1741), a Protestant theologian and Brandenburg court preacher, oversaw the first Hebrew printing press in Berlin at the end of the seventeenth century.

113. This manuscript, the only near-complete manuscript of Rashbam's commentary to the Pentateuch that survived into the modern era, eventually found its way to the Jewish Theological Seminary of Breslau. It was subsequently lost or destroyed.

114. Mendelssohn is referring to words from Old French frequently employed by Rashi to explain biblical words.

alongside Rashi's words. You will find examples of this in Exodus °(25:22) and Leviticus °(13:33, 42) and another instance there °(13:42).

Dubno attended to all this with the book of Genesis °(with the exception of the pericope *Bere'shit* which I commented upon, and to which Dubno added grammatical sections)[115] and completed it. This includes material that I submitted to him, which are marked off between two brackets like this [° °] and introduced by the letters *aleph heh*, the initials for "the translator said [*amar ha-metargem*]." He also gave me material for the commentary on some sections of Numbers, but these were in need of revision since he wrote them only as a first draft and did not go over them again with care, as he did with the sections of Genesis.

I wrote the entire commentary on the book of Exodus myself from beginning to end, with the exception of the bracketed comments, which incorporated the words of Dubno. He was the sole author of *Tiqqun Soferim* to that book as well. He began to print an introduction at the beginning of the volume but never finished it, for before its completion a different spirit passed over him; *I did not know what happened to him* for he left me and *went his own way to his land* (Ex. 32:1, 18:27). It may be that when he [first] approached the work he thought to complete it within a year or two and to receive full compensation for his labor °(I too initially imagined this). But he saw that the work was exceedingly long and difficult and that it would take considerable effort and perseverance on a daily basis, and the printing expenditures continued to multiply such that all the monies contributed by supporters [of the project] would not suffice to pay for the high-quality paper and the expensive printing, which have already exceeded 3,500 Reichsthalers. When he understood all this, his resolve weakened, his strength ebbed away, and he despaired of receiving any compensation altogether. In any event, I was left alone with my brother Saul, and *the burden of God's word* (Zech. 9:1) was upon our shoulders.[116]

I further found *a friend as devoted as a brother* (Prov. 18:24), the communal official responsible for the distribution to the poor, the learned Jeremiah b. Bendit, one of the respected members of this community. He became a support and help, *in charge of those who did the work* (Ezra 3:9), overseeing the expenditures and revenues and even in the timely distribution of the books to those who purchased them, for this requires much quickness and persistence and I am not experienced in such matters. His affairs and business dealings did not prevent

115. The pericope covered Gen. 1:1 to 6:8; for examples of Dubno's grammatical contributions, see the *Be'ur* to Gen. 1:4, 2:25, and 3:22. See also the Editors' Introduction to part IV, n. 29.

116. The circumstances of Dubno's departure were more complicated than Mendelssohn's suppositions, with the motives variously ascribed to a dispute over remuneration, Mendelssohn's refusal to print Dubno's introduction to the Pentateuch in its entirety (see below), and Dubno's growing unease with the questionable religious sincerity of some members of Mendelssohn's circle. See Altmann, *Mendelssohn*, 398–405.

him from taking charge of my responsibilities. *May God remember him favorably for this* (Neh. 13:14).

When I realized that this endeavor was too much for Dubno and that *he could not bear the burden alone* (Deut. 1:9), I beseeched my friend R. Herz Wessely, beloved of my soul, *a man mighty in wisdom* (Prov. 24:5) recognized for his precious and wonderful books, which he wrote *with good counsel and knowledge* (Prov. 22:20), to write the commentary on Leviticus in line with our approach.[117] *Seeing as I was precious to him* (Isa. 43:4) and due to his great love for me, he turned from his business matters and set his mind to explicate that entire book, from beginning to end.[118] He incorporated valuable discussions of *halakhot* and laws, the manner of the language, matters pertaining to the soul, and pathways of ethics and moral qualities; there was no pericope in which he did not include some novel idea in relation to one of these subjects, consistent with the approach he has taken in his [other] well-known and widely regarded writings. *His humility makes him great* (Ps. 18:36) for he magnanimously gave me permission to disagree with him and included my glosses and arguments in bracketed notes in his commentary; the reader will choose for himself what is right in his eyes. With regard to Numbers and Deuteronomy, which I have now completed with God's kindness, I was aided by other men, intelligent colleagues endowed with ability and reputation in Torah and wisdom, but who, out of great modesty, did not allow me to reveal their names.[119] The author of *Tiqqun Soferim* to the last three books [of the Pentateuch] is the grammarian R. Shalom of Mezhirech.[120]

At the end of his introduction to the prospectus *ʿAlim li-Terufah*, Dubno wrote that he would abridge all the rules of grammar pertaining to the consonants and vowels, be they the *dagesh* [*forte*] *and lene*,[121] the mobile or quiescent *sheva*, [the accentuation of] the penultimate or ultimate syllable, the *meteg* and *gaʿya*;[122] or pertaining to the forms of the nouns, verbs, and pronouns; and also [those rules] pertaining to the cantillation and their gradation according to disjunctive and

117. Wessely had already published *Gan Naʿul* (Amsterdam, 1765–66), a two-volume work that analyzed the differences between Hebrew roots, and *Yen Levanon* (Berlin, 1775), a commentary to M. Avot. He also published *Hokhmat Shelomoh* (Berlin, 1780), a Hebrew reconstruction of the apocryphal *Wisdom of Solomon*, around the time he was asked to contribute this commentary.

118. Altmann cited "the delicacy of feeling with which Mendelssohn described Wessely's acceptance," since Wessely was not fully employed and appeared to be in financial straits.

119. From Mendelssohn's private correspondence and other sources, we know the identities of these individuals. The commentary to Numbers was contributed by Aaron Friedenthal of Jaroslav (also known as Aaron Jaroslav). Herz Homberg was asked to produce part of the commentary to Deuteronomy, although the authorship of the final published version is somewhat complicated. On their participation, see the Editors' Introduction to part IV, p. 229 and nn. 33–34.

120. Nothing is known about this individual.

121. See n. 103.

122. See n. 107.

conjunctive [qualities]. He indicated that he would place that in the introduction to the Pentateuch, and for this reason you will find in the first two volumes some instances wherein we mentioned the principles of the language and the cantillation and said that the matter is explained in the introduction. But in fact it is not so, even though it was honestly Dubno's plan. However, *my mind did not reckon it so* (Isa. 10:7) for we are not lacking in books of grammar that I would come to add one more to their number; on these matters, there already exist *books* lengthy and short *without limit* (Ecc. 12:12). It may perhaps be that to this day we are lacking an adequate book on the principles of the cantillation with regard to the twenty-one books [of the Tanakh] or the books of Job, Proverbs, and Psalms,[123] for all we have in Hebrew is the little written by the grammarian R. Zalman Hanau on the twenty-one books,[124] and the brief but precious work published by Dubno from the great scholar and author of *Mirkevet ha-Mishneh* on the cantillation in Job, Proverbs, and Psalms.[125] Nevertheless, these matters have no place at the beginning of the present work. And since, praise God, children today learn all this grammar in primary school, there is no doubt that yet more books will be composed on these matters to satisfy the needs of young school-children; these books will surely lack nothing.

I did, however, see a great need to mention, at the beginning of this work, the principles upon which we based ourselves with regard to the translation of Scripture and their explication, which are lacking in all the writings on language known to me. I did this so that the reader may understand the words of the book insofar as they are built upon those principles. In order to maintain some [sense of] proper order [in this material], I incorporated them all into a section [titled] "Regarding the Parts of Speech and Their Linguistic Application." To you, the reader: go and place *these words upon your heart, for it is good that you preserve them* (Deut. 6:6, Prov. 22:18).

123. The masoretic tradition has two different modes of cantillation; a "prose" system used in most scriptural books, and a "poetic" one used in these three books of the Writings.

124. Solomon Zalman Hanau (1687–1746) was the outstanding grammarian of the first half of the eighteenth century. The work referred to was *Sha'are Zimrah*, the second part of his *Sha'are Torah* (Hamburg, 1718).

125. *Sha'are Ne'imah* (Frankfurt am Oder, 1766), penned by R. Solomon b. Moses of Chelm (1716-1781); Dubno had been a student of R. Solomon's.

[Section III]

REGARDING THE PARTS OF SPEECH AND THEIR LINGUISTIC APPLICATION

Linguists have found that all the words used by an individual to convey his thoughts to someone else can be divided into three categories, these being nouns, verbs, and particles. Each one of these categories has unique qualities not found in the others; some are essential and common to all the languages that adhere to a logical arrangement, and some are incidental, differing and diverging among each nation and its language . . . .[1]

There are words that convey sentiments of the soul and its [emotional] turbulence as it is affected by one or another thought; these are known as *interiection*,[2] such as indications of astonishment, urgency, joy, sadness, revenge, and pity. [Examples of this are:] woe [*hoi*], aha [*he'aḥ*], oh [*oi*], alas [*avoi*], come [*leḵhah*], arise [*qum*], well [*havah*], hurrah [*hedad*], and the like. They are not inflected for gender or number; see what we have written regarding this in our commentary on Exodus °(1:10).[3] The melody of the cantillation does not indicate such matters at all, for it was only implemented to convey textual sequence and pause; as such, there is no difference in the sound of the cantillation of the declarative phrase *they went both together* °(Gen. 22:6) and the question *where is the sheep for the sacrifice*? °(Gen. 22:7) since they are both punctuated with *merḵha tipḥa* and *sof pasuq*.[4] This is also the case with *the impious draw swords and bend bows* °(Ps.

1. We have omitted the bulk of this section and include only the last two pages.

2. Mendelssohn provided the Latin term.

3. In the *Be'ur* to that verse, Mendelssohn briefly explained one such interjection, but referred the reader to Gen. 11:3 for a more extensive explanation. In the commentary to that verse in Genesis, however, Dubno qualified Mendelssohn's comment regarding the inflection of such interjections by distinguishing between two different kinds: (1) those interjections that expressed an imperative to arouse or urge someone to follow up with some action, which were inflected in accordance with gender and number; (2) those that served to express only urgency or emotive exclamation, which remained uninflected. That qualification underscored the occasional editorial seams of this Pentateuch commentary, a clear consequence of the multiple hands that shaped the multiple components of *Sefer Netivot ha-Shalom*.

4. These are the common cantillation marks of all verse endings.

37:14), which was said in anger, and *to God I call: My savior! Why do you forget me*?" °(Ps. 42:10), which was a plea to arouse pity; the cantillation is the same in both verses, and likewise in similar instances. The discerning reader gives voice to all that he conceives and feels in his soul with sound, gesture, winking, and movement, and it is impossible for a writer to assign distinct signs to all these. For this reason there is great advantage for one learning from scholars over one who learns from books,[5] as we mentioned above.

Know that there is a subtle and precise distinction between all these words, even though they appear entirely synonymous; for synonymity without any difference in connotation is not [an instance of linguistic] lucidity, but extraneity, as I have noted for you. By way of example, words that indicate relation to the final cause or to the cause [of something] that we mentioned earlier[6] are not truly synonymous, for if you consider them precisely, you will find that the efficient cause that preceded the intended effect and moved the will of the agent to act is connected to the phrase with the word *yaʿan*. With [the addition of the letter] *bet*, *be-yaʿan* denotes the relation of the effect to its cause °(see Lev. 26:43);[7] but the effect or purpose intended by the one who willed it is connected to the preceding phrase with the word *le-maʿan*. There is also a difference in the connection of names and the connection of phrases; for if the final cause is a name, it is connected with the word *baʿavur*, and the efficient cause by the word *biglal*; and a complete phrase that denotes a cause, if it is known per se or from what preceded, it is connected by the word *yaʿan* °(*weil*), as I said; and if it is something that needs to be made known, we would use the word *ki* °(*denn*).

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5. This line echoes the rabbinic principle regarding testimony, *mi-pihem ve-lo mi-pi ketavam*—that witnesses may not testify from written notes; see above, *Beʾur Millot ha-Higgayon*, p. 85, n. 17. Mendelssohn's extension of this rule to the general superiority of oral transmission informed his attitude toward Jewish learning in particular and intellectual discourse in general. This was particularly evident in *Jerusalem*, which was written at the same time as this introduction; see *JubA*, 8:168–70, 184–85.

6. Mendelssohn was referring to an earlier discussion of particles that connected different clauses or phrases in a sentence, including words such as *le-maʿan*, *yaʿan*, *ki*, *ʿeqev*; the English equivalents are subordinate clauses or coordinating conjunctions such as "so that," "for the reason that," "because," etc.

7. Lev. 26:43 comes at the end of a lengthy section laying out the consequences of Israel's disobedience, and the final clause of this verse reiterated the responsibility that Israel bore for its misdeeds: "Because and in so far [*yaʿan u-ve-yaʿan*] as they have rejected my laws and have wearied of my statutes." Mendelssohn added the following note to Wessely's commentary: "The words *yaʿan u-ve-yaʿan* are not repetitive as a few commentators thought, for *yaʿan* provides a reason °(*alldieweil*) that these bad things will come upon them on account of their sins. [But the word] *u-ve-yaʿan* indicates that the punishment [for Israel's sins] will not continue forever, but only insofar as they maintain their rebellion and continue with their sin, and after they atone for their sins God will remember them and have mercy upon them; this is the function of the letter *bet* [in the word] *u-ve-yaʿan* °(*in so fern*), and so it is translated in the German." Mendelssohn, in other words, argued that in biblical Hebrew, the addition of the preposition *bet* to *yaʿan* indicated the distinction between a reason for something and a statement of condition.

And the ensuing effect or the action following later in time is connected with the word *ʿeqev*. There are also differences of this sort with regard to all the words mentioned,[8] but examining them precisely is a vast endeavor, and I did not want to go on at length.

Other linguistic principles, the rules governing vocalization and syllabification, and the inflection of nouns and verbs in accordance with their details and kinds, are surely found in books of grammar widely available, and there is no need to repeat the matters *with much dabbling* (Ecc. 12:12). It is appropriate for school-children to learn them while in school, for if one educates the young child slowly and you familiarize him with those rules on a daily basis, he will learn them with little effort. Within two years, a child with a lucid mind will know all that he needs from them in order to understand Scripture and the words of the Sages and those of the commentators, and as he grows older he will *increase learning* (Prov. 16:21). Experience attests to the fact that [mastering] language is easy for a person in his childhood and youth, and it is a trifling matter for him to learn many languages. Not so at maturity. Even the scholar devoted to study and with broad learning will find it difficult to learn new languages with which he had no experience and or familiarity from his youth. It would take much toil and effort if he were compelled to learn them at that point. When, in the days of *old age and a gray head* (Ps. 71:18), as forgetfulness overcomes a person, it is almost impossible for him to learn a foreign language, even if his senses were healthy and his mental faculties functioned properly. Given that without [mastering] those rules it is impossible to understand the words of our God and to know their desired aim according to its *peshaṭ*; and if one does not comprehend the scriptural *peshaṭ*, which is the primary intended meaning, how will he consider the second intended meaning, which is our Sages' midrash, [or] even to raise one's head to the deep meaning *hidden with their counsel, and sealed with their treasures* (Deut. 32:34)? There is nothing better than to educate the youth [in the ways of language] in school, one hour a day, as wise men have arranged and instituted in some Jewish communities. Aside from the precious [grammar] books currently available, there is no doubt that here and there new books will also be written for the benefit of young students. My intention in this essay was only *to arouse the ear* of individuals my age, *to listen to teachings* (Isa. 50:4) not mentioned in those books but which I found to have great and significant benefit in understanding Scripture according to the profundity of their *peshaṭ*;[9] the reader will see that in many instances in our commentaries we determined the meaning of Scripture on the very basis of these rules and principles. And so, I said that the time and place to explain these rules and insights in a clear fashion was in the book's introduction so that they enter the student's mind

8. Mendelssohn was again referring back to a lengthy list of particles that he had provided.
9. *ʿomeq peshuṭam*, a phrase originating with Rashbam.

and are etched and preserved there even before he encounters scriptural verses explained by them. New writers should also incorporate these rules in their schoolbooks in easy and concise language, as per the need of young children, and they too will be learned in school with little effort and hard work . . . .[10]

Now, *before I am done speaking* (Gen. 24:45) I beseech my beloved friends: if any of you find in these books any printing error, textual mistake, or some uncertainty in need of clarification—convey this to me by letter or in print so that I can address the mistake or uncertainty. Perhaps *I will be able to correct the twisted thing and to make good that which is lacking* (Ecc. 1:15). It is my duty to print that correction and *distribute it in* Israel (Gen. 49:7), and I will not hold back on the printing expenses, even if it is considerable; this has already cost far more than I imagined at the beginning of the endeavor, *a precious fortune* (Prov. 1:13).[11] However, the *monetary spoil* (Judg. 5:19) should not trump what is good and right, and on account of this I did not want to add to the price of the books from that which I set in the pamphlet *ʿAlim li-Terufah*; if the amount is minimal, I said it is better to incur the loss than to defraud. You, *men of truth*! (Ex. 18:21) Lovers of the Eternal's Torah! *Put me to the tes*t (Mal. 3:10): if there is something erroneous in these books do not withhold the good of putting it in writing and sending it to me, whether *with open rebuke or concealed love* (Prov. 27:5), *whatever your inclination* (Ez. 20:32). *Set it here, before* all of Israel*, and let them decide between us* (Gen. 31:37) if I do not admit to words of *favor and intelligence* (Prov. 3:4) and accept the truth in happiness from whatever source it comes. One *who shuts his eyes from seeing* the light of truth (Isa. 33:15)—*his name will be covered in darkness* (Ecc. 6:4). But he who seeks [truth] will neither stumble nor be shamed, for [truth] is the seal of the Holy One,[12] blessed be He and blessed be His great name, and one who travels in its light is *like the sun rising in its might* (Judg. 5:31). You—*love truth and peace*! (Zech. 8:19)

Berlin, the new moon of Nissan, 5543:[13]

Moses the son of Menahem Mendel the Scribe.

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10. Mendelssohn added a paragraph, here omitted, apologizing for a drawing he had ordered for the title page but then chose to omit. That drawing was to double as an illustration to his comment on Ex. 27:11, and the *Beʾur* still contained a note to this effect.

11. Since *Sefer Netivot ha-Shalom* was originally distributed to pre-subscribers in unbound sections, Mendelssohn was committing himself to reprinting and redistributing any pages containing errors.

12. See, e.g., Shab. 55a.

13. Corresponding to April 2 or 3, 1783.

SELECTIONS FROM GENESIS

Genesis 1:31

[The opening account of creation in Genesis 1 provided an ordered description of the basic cosmological and biological elements that constitute the universe. The elements were marked off with the ordinal numbering of the days and the recurring phrase "and God saw that it was good." The final verse in Genesis 1 diverged from this pattern in two seemingly small ways.]

1:31 God looked over all that He had made, and found it very good; thus it was evening and it was morning, that sixth day.

Commentary

31. **And God looked over, etc.** [*va-yar elohim*]: a thoughtful [reader] will discern that with regard to the preceding days Scripture only said *and God saw that it was good*, and here, on the sixth day, it said **all that He had made, and found it very good**. The notion is that there is no complete and absolute good in the particulars that exist, but rather good and bad commingled, one included with the other. Many evils are to be found among the particulars of created things. Some are consequent upon their being created things, for it is impossible that any created thing would be perfect in its utmost perfection as it is necessarily composed of *habitus* and privation,[1] with privation being the source of evil. Other [evils] are consequent upon the unending series of causes and effects like accidents of time and its attendant misfortunes. Still others are consequent on choice, these being evils of moral dispositions and deeds. All these are bad in some respect and good in some respect; they are bad in terms of the particular components and good in terms of the totality. For there is no existence whatsoever to absolute, complete evil; it is impossible and self-contradictory, since everything

1. *qinyan ve-he'eder*; the former can also be translated as "state" or "condition." The terms are contraries, e.g., light-darkness, good-evil.

extant is good insofar as it exists. And were it not that those evils were good in one respect, it would not be possible for them to have been brought into existence in a world created by a Being that is good and does good, that loves good with the utmost love and abhors absolute evil with the utmost abhorrence.

You should know, from this, that even a particular evil is good and in accord with the intended purpose of creation and necessary in its perpetuation, as it is said in Scripture, *For everything there is a moment, a time for every matter* °(Ecc. 3:1). Let me offer an example. Death is bad in that it negates the form of a living being. However, in terms of the totality, even death is good since generation and degeneration are conjoined and interconnected, such that all degeneration is a cause for generation, and all generation is a cause for degeneration, and through them all created things change from one form to another according to God's designated purpose. So too with the evils due to choice and deeds: they are evils with respect to the one who chooses them, but desire and freedom of choice are a great benefit and good for the world in its totality, without which its perseverance would not be possible. There is no freedom of choice without the possibility of doing something or its opposite, and as such, evil choices are also good in this respect. God can also overturn them and direct them toward the good with His providence and compassion, for this is the purpose of creation—to correct evil and change it to good.

Now, with regard to the [six] earlier days of creation, Scripture speaks only of the particulars of creation in which there is no absolute good, but evil and good commingled. Since, however, in some respect evil too is necessary for establishing the good, God understood that it was in accord with the ultimate purpose and desired its existence, not with respect to its being an evil, but in terms of its necessity for the good. He desired death not with respect to its being the negation of a form but in its being a cause for generation. Likewise, God wanted an evil inclination not in terms of its leading people astray to evil but for its necessity in the establishment of the world. And this is indicated in the phrase *and God saw that it was good*.

However, on this sixth day, when all the work was done in its totality, God saw **all that He had made**, and with regard to the totality of the world there is no evil whatsoever, because in terms of the totality everything is good and in great accord with God's intended purpose. If it were possible for that purpose to be attained in a manner that better suited the Creator's will, there is no doubt that He would have chosen that way. Given that He chose in this extant totality and order, there is no doubt that it correlates highly with the will of the Creator and that through it His intended purpose will be attained in the best and most desirable way. And this is indicated in [the words] **and found it very good**. The particulars of creation are referred to as good, but the totality is very good. Understand this.

You should know and ponder what the Sages said in Genesis Rabbah, "*and found it very good*—this is death."[2] And likewise, they said "this is the evil inclination"[3] and "this is the measure of divine punishment."[4] And in the *Zohar* to Genesis: "*God looked over all He had made, and found it very good*—this is a correction for the omission of *it was good* on the second day,[5] since death was created on that day;[6] and here it says *and found it very good* following the scholars who taught: *and found it very good*—this is death."[7] And on the subject of the totality of creation and what God desired of it, I found a precious statement there [in the *Zohar*]: "*All that He had made*—to include all the generations who would come afterwards and all that would arise in the world in each and every generation, before they came to be. *That He had made*—that is, all the works of Creation, for in it was created the foundation and basis for everything that would come and be generated in the world afterwards. And on account of this, God saw it before it came to be, and placed all of it in the work of creation."[8] According to this, the statement **all that He had made** would include not only the things that came into being then but everything that would be generated and produced afterwards up until the end of all the generations, for God placed the foundation and source of all things in the act of creation. And only with regard to the totality of this existence, incorporating all worlds and times, does Scripture say **very good**. Understand this.

that sixth day [*yom ha-shishi*]: the [ordinal] adjective [*shishi*] has a definite article while the noun [*yom*] being modified is without it, which is grammatically irregular. Ibn Ezra stated that "it means 'the day that is sixth from the first day,' and so too *the seventh day* [*yom ha-shevi'i*] (Gen. 2:3), and [this construction] is likewise found with *the Israelite* [*ve-'ish ha-yisre'eli*] °(Lev. 24:10) and many cases like them, including *the expanse of the sky* [*reqi'a ha-shamayim*] (Gen. 1:20)—the expanse which is sky" °(although that last [example proffered by Ibn Ezra] is not much of a proof since it is a construct). Since the definite article was not added

2. Gen. R. 9:5. The wording of the citation diverges from Genesis Rabbah but is attested in the *Zohar*, cited below.

3. Ibid., 9:7.

4. Ibid., 9:11. While the references are midrashic, Mendelssohn's wording indicated that his immediate source was Ramban.

5. The six-fold repetition of the phrase *and God saw that it was good* in Genesis 1 did not appear in a perfectly regular pattern, and was in fact omitted on the second day of creation.

6. A statement in Gen. R. 1:3 suggesting that all angels were created on the second day was taken in the *Zohar* I:46a to include the angel of death.

7. *Zohar* I:47a. Here and below, Mendelssohn was specifically interested in exegetical and literary elements of this Kabbalistic text; cf. n. 11 below.

8. Ibid.

on the previous days but only on the sixth alone, the German translator[9] was of the opinion that these words referred to *then the heavens had been completed* in the verse that immediately followed. Scripture could thus be restated: it was evening and it was morning of the sixth day in which the making of the heavens and the earth and all the host had been completed, and all [its parts] formed a whole—conjoined, completed, and interconnected, as it says in the *Zohar*: "What is the difference with respect to all the other days, wherein the [ordinal numbers] are lacking the definite article?[10] Here, etc.,[11] they were perfected as one—perfected above all and complete in everything."[12]

9. I.e., Mendelssohn; he regularly used the third person in the *Be'ur* when referring to his translation.

10. In the *Zohar*, the phrase at the end of the question read ". . . lacking the *heh*," leaving the way open to an answer that mined its numerological and sefirotic values. Mendelssohn, however, rendered this as *heh ha-yedi'ah*.

11. In his citations of the *Zohar* Mendelssohn generally omitted mythical elements, and the line omitted here referred to sefirotic and gendered elements characteristic of the *Zohar*: "Here, when the world was completed, female conjoined with male into a single unit, *heh* with *shishi* so that all become one."

12. *Zohar* I:47a.

Genesis 2:4

[In Genesis 1:1–2:3, the opening account of creation, the deity who brought forth heaven and earth was referred to by the name *elohim*. Genesis 2:4, which served as the transition to a second and substantially different account of creation, added the tetragrammaton to the divine name, which now appeared as *yhvh elohim*.]

2:4 This is the genesis of the heaven and the earth as they were created, namely when the Eternal Being, God, made earth and heaven.

Commentary

4. **this** [*eleh*]: the things mentioned above.[1]

genesis [*toledot*]: the account of how the heaven and the earth were produced and came to be.

when . . . made [*be-yom ʿasot*]: this teaches you that they were all created on the first day—this is the comment of Rashi.[2] But according to the *peshaṭ*, *be-yom* means "at the time," similar to the verse *for as soon as* [*be-yom*] *you eat of it, you are destined for death* °(below, v. 17) and many others like it.[3] The word **made** means the production of a thing according to its proper constitution, similar to *and he hastened to prepare it* [*laʿasot oto*] °(Gen. 18:7) and to the verse in Isaiah

1. Rashi. The comment resolved the ambiguity of the pronoun, which referred either to the account of creation that appeared in Genesis 1 or to what followed.

2. Read literally, the words *be-yom ʿasot* could be taken to mean "on the day [God] made." Rashi's comment is based on Gen. R. 12:4 and the view of R. Nehemiah that all the things generated over six days were created on the very first day, not unlike fruit that may bud at the same time but ripen separately.

3. The point regarding the word *be-yom* was made earlier by Radaq, *Sefer ha-Shorashim*, s.v. *yud–vav–mem*, and in Ramban's commentary on Gen. 2:17.

°(43:7) which said *created*, then *formed*, and finally *made* [*ʿasitiv*].[4] Creation involves bringing matter from non-existence into existence, in German *Schaffung*; formation is giving form to matter, in German *Bildung*; and making something [*ʿasiyah*] is its final production according to its constitution, in German *Verfertigung*. And so, [the phrase] **when the Eternal Being, God, made earth and heaven** referred to the six days of creation already mentioned.

the Eternal Being, God [*yhvh elohim*]: the pericope above used only the name *elohim* [in reference to the divine], while here it said *yhvh elohim*: *yhvh* who is called God [*elohim*],[5] who is the ruler and judge of all; this is the meaning of [that name] in all instances according to its *peshaṭ—yhvh*, who is God. But our Sages expounded it as two names, [one representing] the measure of justice, [the other] the measure of mercy.

It may be that the pericope above, from *in the beginning* (Gen. 1:1) to *had made* (2:3), was received by select individuals from the days of the hallowed forefathers—and perhaps from Adam and Seth—a tradition orally transmitted from fathers to sons. Through that story, those hallowed individuals taught their sons and students the secret of the Account of the Beginning and the creation of the world, and from it that belief spread to the ends of the earth and to every people and language so that there is no nation or language that does not have some knowledge or inkling of that principle. However, that tradition was distorted among some of them by the vanities of those who pretend to be wise and the fabrications of their poets who *proclaim as if from the heavens* (Ps. 73:9), and who *contrived on their own things that are not right* (1 Kgs. 12:33, 2 Kgs. 17:9) in order to draw the hearts of the masses upon whom the light of God's Torah never shone. They mixed truth with falsehood and retained only a few intimations [of the truth], like light that sparkles *in the darkest gloom of night* (Prov. 7:9).

It is acknowledged that familiarity with the name denoting God's particular providence over the treasure of humanity and the divine attachment to those who heed his words only became known with the signs and miracles that He did for Israel when he took them forth from Egypt and set them apart to serve Him, as we will explain, God willing, with regard to the verse *but by my Essence, which means boundless and ever-present, I was not known by them* °(Ex. 6:3). See the Commentary there.

Now, when Moses wrote the Torah at God's behest he placed that received pericope at the beginning of the Torah, and he used only the name *elohim* denot-

4. This was drawn from Ibn Ezra, with Mendelssohn's slight amplification.

5. This comment, from the phrase "*yhvh* who is called God" until the end of the sentence is taken almost verbatim from Rashi to v. 5. Although there are slight variations in Rashi's formulation, his comment was understood to mean "*yhvh*—this is his name; elohim—who is the ruler and judge . . . ." Mendelssohn, however, added the relative pronoun *shin*, rendering the opening words as *yhvh hu she-shemo elohim*, and we have translated accordingly.

ing the absolute power and rule over every possible thing that could be brought into existence and to control it according to his will.[6] [The Torah] then goes on to add **This is the genesis of the heaven and the earth as they were created, namely when the Eternal Being, God, made** [**heaven and earth**] in order to indicate that the all-powerful Essence, the glorified Name who looks after His servants and reveals His secrets to His prophets, who is present for them when they call out to Him—He is the Eternal Being, God.

The German translator rendered the glorified Name as *das Ewige Wesen* [the Eternal Being] and sometimes as *der Ewige* [the Eternal] since that name contains [the notion that God] was, is, and will be. See the *Be'ur* to Exodus on the verse *this is my Name forever* °(Ex. 3:16), for that is the proper place [for this discussion]. Onqelos translated the name *elohim* in the first chapter with the word *y"y*, and the words *yhvh elohim* as *y"y elohim*; I did not understand his intention.

6. That is, God's complete power and control over the laws of nature as they are designed in conformity with divine wisdom and contingent upon God's will. This was to be distinguished from necessary or immutable laws, such as the propositions of logic and pure mathematics, wherein it was impossible to conceive of alternative laws or exceptions. Cf. his discussion in *Jerusalem*, *JubA*, 8:157–58 [Arkush, *Jerusalem*, 90–91].

Genesis 2:9

[Genesis 2:5–8 reversed the order of the first account of creation, first describing the creation of man and his placement in the Garden of Eden and then turning to the trees that would be planted in its midst. The most notable of these, in light of the narrative that will unfold in Genesis 3, is the tree of knowledge of good and bad.]

2:9 The Eternal Being, God, caused the earth to grow all manner of trees lovely to view and good to eat; the tree of life was in the midst of the garden, and the tree of knowledge of good and evil.

Commentary

9. **the Eternal Being, God, caused the earth to grow . . .** [*va-yaṣmaḥ adonai elohim min ha-ʾadamah*]: This verse is referring to the earth of the garden,[1] for it was there that the [earlier divine] pronouncement *let the earth sprout* (Gen. 1:11) was first fulfilled. That the earth brought forth **all manner of trees lovely to view and good to eat** [also] fits with what we explained [in v. 1:11] above, that in line with the original intention [of creation and] prior to the earth being cursed on account of Adam's sin, the earth would only produce fruit that was fit for human consumption.

the tree of life was in the midst of the garden [*ve-ʿeṣ ha-ḥayyim be-tokh ha-gan*]: this verse says **in the midst of the garden**, and not [simply] "in the garden" [*ba-gan*]. And furthermore, Scripture [later] has *and the fruit of the tree that is in the midst of the garden* (Gen. 3:3) without indicating [which tree it was by adding] a further term of reference, implying that this [vague] allusion was enough to distinguish it from the other trees. This is why Onqelos translated it as "in the

1. Rashi, but cf. Ibn Ezra.

middle of the garden." Both of the trees, the tree of life and the tree of knowledge, were in the middle of the garden, as if one had an enclosed garden bed containing these two trees. This middle is an approximate middle, for with regard to the precise middle, it has already been said that no one knows the true center-point but God.[2]

the tree of life [*ve-ʿeṣ ha-ḥayyim*]: a tree whose fruit gives long life to those who eat of it.[3]

and the tree of knowledge of good and evil [*ve-ʿeṣ ha-daʿat tov va-raʿ*]: The [grammatical formulation] is like *the tent of Sarah his mother* [*ha-ʾohelah sarah immo*]" °(Gen. 24:67), *the ark of the covenant* [*ha-ʾaron ha-berit*] °(Josh. 3:14), and many such examples where [a noun in] the construct state has a definite article.[4] Grammarians have said that this [irregular formulation] was to be [understood] as "the ark, (being the ark) of covenant," [or] "the [tree of] knowledge, (being the knowledge) of good and evil."[5]

On the meaning of the tree of knowledge, Ramban cited what other exegetes said:[6] "The fruit produced a desire for sexual intercourse, and therefore [Adam and Eve] covered their nakedness after they ate of it. In support [of this reading] they cited a similar expression of Barzillai the Gileadite, *can I tell* [*ha-ʾedaʿ*] *the difference of good and bad?* °(2 Sam. 19:36) for he had lost that [sexual] desire.[7] I do not deem this to be correct, since Scripture says *you will be like divine beings, knowing good and evil* (Gen. 3:5). And if you were to say that the serpent deceived the woman in order to seduce her, [the counterproof is that] God says *now Adam is like one of us, to know good and evil* (Gen. 3:22). And [furthermore][8] they have already said:[9] 'Three individuals spoke the truth and [nevertheless] perished: the serpent, the spies, and Doeg the Edomite.'"

Ramban's opinion was as follows: "[In his original state,] man naturally acted in accordance with the natural order, just like the heavens and all their hosts

2. Ramban, with some editing for clarity and brevity.

3. Ramban.

4. In biblical Hebrew, the genitive construction is formed by the construct state, and the modified noun generally does not carry a definite article. These examples are exceptions to that rule.

5. Chief among the grammarians that Mendelssohn has in mind was Ibn Ezra, who addressed this very point in his commentary here and to Gen. 24:67.

6. Ramban did not specify which exegetes he had in mind, but they would certainly include Ibn Ezra to Gen. 3:6 and Radaq to Gen. 2:17. The objections to this reading cited in this paragraph are also Ramban's.

7. The link between Barzillai's advanced age and declining sexual desire is based on Shab. 152a.

8. That is, a further argument against the notion that the serpent lied to the woman.

9. Although Ramban seems to refer to a rabbinic text, there is no clear source for this statement as cited. A proximate source, but one missing the crucial mention of the serpent, appears in an obscure and late (ninth century?) midrashic text variously called *Pirqe de-Rabbenu ha-Qadosh* or *Midrash Maʿaseh Torah*.

whose motions remain true and never diverge from their charge,[10] and in whose actions there is neither love nor hate. But the fruit of this tree [of knowledge] gave rise to will and want, such that those who partook of it could choose between something and its converse, for good or evil. This is why it was called the tree of knowledge of good and evil, for knowledge [*daʿat*] in our language is an expression of will, as in the [rabbinic] phrase, 'they only taught this rule[11] with regard to someone whose intention [*daʿato*] was to return.' [So too] in the language of Scripture: *what is man that You are mindful of him* [*va-tedaʿehu*] °(Ps. 144:3) [meaning] that you want and care for him; *I have singled you out* [*yedaʿtikha*] *by name* °(Ex. 33:12)—I chose you from all others. So too the statement of Barzillai the Gileadite [cited above], *can I tell* [*ha-ʾedaʿ*] *the difference of good and bad* meant that he lost the ability to be mindful of things: he would not choose something or loathe it—he would eat without tasting and hear a song without taking pleasure in it. In this [original] state, Adam and his wife did not engage in sexual intercourse as a matter of desire, but when it came to propagation, they copulated and produced offspring. This is why in their eyes all their limbs were the same, and they were not ashamed of them. But now, after their eating of the tree, man had the ability to choose; he had the will to do evil or good, whether to himself or to others. This was, in one respect, a divine quality, but it was bad for man in that it gave him yearning and desire. This is possibly what Scripture meant when it stated that *God made men upright, but they sought many contrivances*' (Ecc. 7:29)—upright, when man keeps to one straight path, and seeking many contrivances, when he chooses between diverse actions."

Close to this is the opinion of Maimonides, except that according to him good and evil meant agreeable and repugnant, and these, in his opinion, were not to be considered intelligibles [*muskalot*] at all, but rather generally accepted opinions [*mefursamot*].[12] It is known that on this [subject] Maimonides followed Aristotle's thinking, as he mentioned many times in his writings, that "with regard to that which is of necessity there is no good and evil, but only true and false."[13] Good and bad are matters that are widely accepted by all individuals, and they do not relate to the intellect at all. And with regard to the verse *you will be like divine beings, knowing good and evil* (Gen. 3:5) he wrote: "Every Hebrew knew that the term *elohim* is equivocal, designating the deity, the angels, and the magistrates governing the cities. Onqelos the convert already explained—and his clarification is correct—that when Scripture said *you will be like divine beings, knowing good and evil*, the last sense was intended, [since] he translated it: 'and

10. Ramban's language was drawn from the traditional blessing on the new moon; see San. 42a.

11. This rabbinic teaching concerned one who departed from home before Passover and the obligation to dispose of the leavened material (*ḥameṣ*) in one's property. The line cited here referred to a case where an individual intended to return home during Passover.

12. See *Guide* I:2. And cf. above, *Beʾur Millot ha-Higgayon*, ch. 8, pp. 79–80, 83–84.

13. *Guide* I:2.

you shall be as rulers.'"[14] But Maimonides neglected to address the statement that God uttered, *now Adam is like one of us, to know good and evil* (Gen. 3:22), which is very difficult according to his interpretation. [Furthermore,] Onqelos translated that verse as "behold, Adam has become unique in the world, knowing good and evil by himself [*minneh*]" with the word *mimmennu*[15] referring to Adam and not God. This is extremely forced and I do not know how to harmonize it with the scriptural *peshaṭ*; for what can be the meaning of *behold, Adam has become unique in the world, knowing good and evil by himself*? °(See our *Be'ur* to that verse.)

Moreover, we cannot agree to what Maimonides said with regard to [good and evil being] generally accepted opinions. In truth, good and evil also belong to the class of intelligibles, and agreeable and repugnant are not synonymous with good and evil, since the terms good and evil are used with regard to the intellect, and agreeable and repugnant are used with regard to the senses. There are many correct proofs concerning this point, but this is not the place to expatiate. Now, Ramban's commentary cited above eluded this difficulty, and in his opinion there was much benefit and great advantage in the knowledge of good and evil insofar as it was a divine quality, although it was harmful with regard to man in that it gave him yearning and desire. This approach is more correct, and I will offer you some additional explanation to his words:

It appears from Ramban's commentary that before he sinned, Adam was not endowed with any choice and will at all; rather, his actions were cast in accordance with nature, resembling the celestial bodies that [Ramban] mentioned explicitly. It is very difficult to incorporate this [into the biblical narrative], but it is not my intention to expound on the many doubts which pertain to it. I will, however, inform you of the opinion of the German translator in response to these difficulties. These are his words:[16]

Before I address [these passages] I will preface my remarks with an introduction. The entire account of creation and everything that Scripture related with regard to Adam and Eve and Cain and Abel is without doubt completely and unfailingly true. What is told about those individuals actually happened to them. Notwithstanding this, they contain an allusion to and serve as an archetype for the human species in its entirety. What befell Adam and his sons and what happened to them in particular is what befalls humanity as a whole. This is why Scripture went to some length in relating their details, and the intelligent

14. Ibid.

15. Onqelos' translation reflected his discomfort with the plain sense of the biblical verse, "now Adam is like one of us [*mimmennu*], to know good and evil." He thus chose to read *mimmennu* as if it were third-person singular ("of himself, by himself") and to connect it with the second half of the phrase.

16. See the editors' introduction to *Sefer Netivot ha-Shalom*, n. 29.

individual would understand the story of humankind from their creation until the end of the generations.

Now, man has a faculty of reason and a faculty of desire. With the faculty of reason he obtains truths and distinguishes between truth and falsehood and between good and evil, because that which brings him to felicity is referred to as good, and that which keeps it from him is considered evil. And with the faculty of desire he yearns for the good and cleaves to it and flees from evil, and as such, it can be useful and injurious with regard to the intellect.

With regard to the senses, good and evil are referred to as agreeable and repugnant. Cleaving to the good begets delight and cleaving to evil begets affliction. There is true good and imagined good, and likewise true and imagined evil. The true good produces true delight and the imagined good produces imagined delight. The same obtains with evil and affliction. Our ancient scholars have already said: "With regard to good, there is nothing higher than delight, and nothing with regard to evil lower than affliction."[17]

Now, the conjoining of the faculties of apprehension and desire gives rise to the qualities of the soul, these being the dispositions to harm or to benefit, be it oneself or others. [These dispositions] are determined by an individual's apprehension and ability to distinguish between good and evil, and by his facility to desire to do good and to prevent evil. The perfection of the intelligent being is predicated on his having a properly arrayed equilibrium of the faculties of apprehension and desire, which in turn produce the noble qualities. For the more powerful the faculty of apprehension to discern good and evil, the greater the desire and the stronger the love of good and the hatred of evil, and the intelligent being is thus aroused to cleave to good. It is along these lines that the Sages said: "The greater the individual, the greater his desire."[18]

However, if the proportion between those faculties is wanting, the resulting moral qualities are inferior and defective. For if the faculty of desire overcomes that of reason, it steers the individual toward an appetite for luxuries and sensual pleasure; he pursues the imagined good and the agreeable and forsakes the true good.[19] At times, his eyes see and his mind perceives the true good that brings him to felicity, but the power of the desire that overcomes proper reasoning seduces him to be drawn after bodily pleasures and to be mired in the pursuit of sensual pleasures. This is the cause of all sin and all rebelliousness in man. And [conversely,] when the faculty of apprehension overcomes that of desire, the individual slackens in performing good deeds as required; he will not reach the level of

17. This statement appears in *Sefer Yeṣirah*, ch. 2, and is cited in *Kuzari* IV:25, but in contexts unrelated to Mendelssohn's present discussion. Mendelssohn also revised the line slightly, citing it as *en be-ṭovah le-maʿalah min ha-ʿoneg, ve-ʾen be-raʿah le-maṭah min ha-negaʿ*.

18. Sukk. 52a.

19. On the deleterious effects of luxury, see *Megillat Qohelet* to 4:4, and the epilogue to Exodus, pp. 465–70 below.

a brave man who performed great deeds (1 Chron. 11:22), as overpowering as a lion in doing what is good and right and *fighting the battles of the Lord* (1 Sam. 18:17) against all the obstacles that frighten and deter him. That man would flee the slight pain and sorrow that afflicts him in doing good, and he would sit in slothfulness and with lazy hands at *the sound of a driven leaf* (Lev. 26:36). Ultimately, even his apprehension becomes confused and he fails with respect to his faculty of reason and spirit of understanding. This is in line with what the Sages said regarding one whose wisdom is greater than his deeds: "his wisdom does not endure."[20]

Hence *God made man upright* upon the earth (Ecc. 7:29) and established the proper equilibrium and fitting balance between his apprehension and desire. Had man remained ensconced in that virtuous disposition he would not have deviated at all from the good by increasing the faculty for desire, but only on account of a deficiency in apprehension, namely by mistaking the good for evil or vice versa. This would only have happened on occasion; moreover, a failure of apprehension is not sin and a deficiency in knowledge is not rebelliousness if the individual exhibiting this failure did not have the facility to augment his knowledge and apprehension. This is what the Sages meant when they said that "an error in one's learning is considered a deliberate transgression."[21] Thus, although Adam had free choice and will even before he sinned, he nevertheless was not liable to be entrapped by desire or struck by sensual delights; for his desire was connected and harmonized with his apprehension in equal and proper proportion according to the intention of the Creator, may He be blessed, and in a manner that brought him to felicity and the true good. Adam and his wife experienced sexual desire and delighted in that passion in a measure that was fitting and appropriate to the goal of perpetuating the species. When sexual desire is so disposed it is not repugnant or disgraceful to man as some inquiries have supposed. On the contrary: it is something glorious.

This is the reason that Adam and Eve went about naked and were not ashamed. For it is known that man experiences shame and disgrace when uncovering his genitals on account of a surge of desire, when the imagination races here and there in seeing nakedness and arouses appetite and desire to a degree and in a manner inappropriate toward the [proper] objective. Now, it was in the nature of the tree of knowledge to strengthen the faculty of desire and to augment its intensity, such that when he ate of it, Adam's faculty of desire became like that of the heavenly angels. The strengthening of that desire and the intensification of its power is of great advantage and much benefit with regard to those celestial beings, since it is properly proportioned to the degree of their

20. M. Avot 3:9.

21. Ibid., 4:13. Mendelssohn understood the statement to apply only when the individual was capable of grasping a subject properly; in the absence of such abilities, the trespass would be unwitting and thus of a different magnitude.

apprehension. The degree of their apprehension and reason is matched by their increased desire to do the will of their Maker, to love the good with a strong love and to hate evil with an abundance to hate; that is their glory. But with regard to man this was a great problem, since in relation to his limited apprehension his faculty for desire grew beyond proper measure and proportion, after which it affected the repugnant dispositions mentioned above, namely seeking luxuries and love of physical delights. Man is immersed and *submerged in the quagmire* (Ps. 69:3) of the imagined good; he turns to the pleasant and sweet, to the sense and to the imagination while turning his back on the true good that delivers him to the true felicity and contentment. These were the words of the German translator. With this approach, it would appear that all the difficulties raised by exegetes with regard to this pericope would be solved, as will be seen in the verses that follow.

Genesis 2:16–18

[After man was placed in the Garden of Eden (Gen. 2:15), he was warned not to eat of the tree of knowledge of good and bad and that doing so would result in immediate death. The biblical text then turned back to the creation story by noting man's solitary existence and the need to find him a helpmate.]

2:16 The Eternal Being, God, commanded the man and said; "Of every tree of the Garden you may eat.

17 "Only of the tree of knowledge of good and evil, of it you shall not eat; for as soon as you eat of it, you are destined for death."

18 The Eternal Being, God, said also: "It is not good for man to remain alone; I will make him a helpmate, to be about him."

Commentary

16. **commanded** [*va-yeṣav*]: the verb "command" followed by the [preposition] *ʿal* connotes a prohibition,[1] in German *verbieten*; and without the preposition *ʿal* it connotes a positive commandment (*gebieten*, *befehlen*).

you may eat [*aḵhol toʾḵhel*]: it is allowed and permissible for you to eat.[2]

17. **of it you shall not eat** [*lo toʾḵhal mimmennu*]: it says **of it** even after it had already said **of the tree** for further clarity, like the verse *and she opened and saw*

1. Ibn Ezra.

2. The imperative *aḵhol* might be misconstrued to suggest a demand or decree, hence the comment. Ibn Ezra made the same point in passing. Cf. also the *Beʾur* to Deut. 17:15.

him—the boy °(Ex. 2:6); or **of it** could be referring to that which comes from the tree, namely the fruit; or it may mean even a small portion **of it**.[3]

for as soon as you eat of it, etc. [*ki be-yom akhalekha*]: "When[4] you eat of it you will be destined for death, and likewise *on the very day that you leave* [Jerusalem] *and go anywhere else, know surely that you will die* °(I Kings 2:42), where the intended meaning is not that he will die immediately on that very day, nor is it merely referring to the knowledge [of his impending death]; rather, it means that when he leaves [the city] he will be liable for death at the hands of the king, who will put him to death at the time of his choosing. [This is likewise the case in the verses] *Do not let them go inside to look when the sanctuary is being wrapped,* [for] *they would be destined for death* (Num. 4:20) and *so that they bear no offense and die on account of it* (Lev. 22:9), since their meaning is only that they are liable for death and that they would die on account of this transgression. According to the opinion of the natural scientists man was destined for death from the moment of his formation given that he was a composite creature.[5] But now God decreed that if he transgressed he would die on account of his transgression like those who sin and are liable for death in the hands of heaven, such as one who [improperly] eats *terumah*,[6] or [a *kohen*] who serves in the sanctuary while intoxicated or without the proper vestments, and others;[7] the intended meaning with regard to those cases is that they will die prematurely on account of their transgression. This is why, with regard to [Adam's] punishment, the verse [below, 3:19] stated *until you arrive again in the earth from which you were taken, for you are dust and shall again return to dust*—in line with your nature. Also, even at the outset [Adam] would eat fruit and things that sprouted from the earth; as such, there must have been [physical] depletion and a cause for [bodily] generation and degeneration.

"But according to our Sages, if [Adam] had not sinned he would never have died[8] for the higher soul bestows eternal life, and the divine will [instilled] in him at the time of his formation would always cleave to him and sustain him

3. This comment was an amalgam of Ibn Ezra and Ibn Melekh's reformulation of that commentary.

4. Mendelssohn began his comment with a lengthy citation from Ramban's commentary, duly noted below.

5. I.e., comprised of material elements and therefore subject to degeneration.

6. *Terumah* was the tithe set aside for the exclusive use of the *kohanim*, the priests responsible for the Temple and its cultic ceremonies. The reference here was to an Israelite (i.e., a non-*kohen*) who partook of the *terumah*, or a *kohen* in a state of ritual impurity who partook of *terumah* that was ritually pure. Mendelssohn's slight editing of Ramban's commentary allowed for both possibilities.

7. These cases were among those cited by the Sages as liable for death at the hands of heaven; see San. 83a–b.

8. This was not explicitly stated but inferred from a number of rabbinic passages; see Shab. 55b and Gen. R. 17:8.

forever, as I explained to the verse *and God saw that it was good*.[9] But know that only those of little faith are of the opinion that man's composite nature indicates [his] degeneration,[10] for the world was created by the simple will of God, [and] it will exist forever as [an expression of] that will; this is an evident truth. And so, the meaning of **for as soon as you eat of it, you are destined for death** is that you will then be subject to mortality; you will not exist forever by My will. [On this account,] eating was initially a matter of pleasure, and it was possible that the fruits of the Garden of Eden were [perfectly] absorbed in the bodily appendages just like the manna and sustained those who consumed them.[11] But when God decreed upon Adam to *eat of the herbs of the field* and that *by the sweat of his face he would eat bread* from the ground (Gen. 3:18–19)—that was the cause of degeneration, *for he is dust* and dust he shall eat *and to dust he shall return* [ibid.]." These were the words of Ramban.[12]

[Ramban's] opinion, that eating was initially a matter of pleasure, is highly implausible, for even the pleasure involved in eating arises in man because of the bodily need for food due to [physical] depletion. I do not know what compelled him to [say] this, since it is conceivable that man would be nourished by food to the [exact] extent of his daily depletion. The body would thus persist and would exist forever. Perhaps he intended to say this when he said that the [fruits of the Garden] were absorbed in the bodily appendages.

18. **it is not good for man to remain alone** [*lo ṭov heyot ha-ʾadam levado*]: the intent in this was that it was not fitting for the purpose of man's creation that he should remain alone without a helpmate, for man is by nature social and he will not obtain felicity without the assistance of his species. If he were to remain alone, the faculties and capacities of his soul would not advance from the potential to the actual; he would be *like the beasts* of the earth (Ps. 49:13), perhaps not even rising to their level. Man's very life—his sustenance, his physical health, and his bodily protection—is all [attainable] through the assistance of others. As such, man would have no existence were it said "it is good for him to be alone."

a helpmate, to be about him [*ʿezer ke-negdo*]: God said this in reference to the woman for she always assists man and attends to him; and the word *ke-negdo* is used to indicate that she should always be before and about him to attend to him. The [prefixed preposition] *kaf* appears here to assert the point, like the *kaf* in *on a certain day* [*ke-hayyom*] °(Gen. 39:11), or [*the people*] *complained*

9. The reference is to Ramban's commentary.
10. I.e., his natural mortality.
11. On the extraordinary absorption of the manna, see Yoma 75b.
12. The comment was cited with Mendelssohn's editing.

[*ke-mit'onenim*] °(Num. 11:1).[13] Ramban wrote: "The matter may be like the Sage who said 'Adam was created with two visages';[14] they were made to have the natural impetus, by means of the reproductive organs from the male to the female, for procreation. Alternatively this may be [a reference to] seed, in line with the well-known debate concerning conception,[15] where that [second] visage was an aid to the first in procreating. God saw that it was good that the helpmate stood in front of him where he could see it and separate or conjoin with it at will. This is the meaning of **I will make him a helpmate, to be about him**."

13. Mendelssohn's immediate source for both comments was Ibn Melekh, but they were based on Radaq, *Sefer ha-Shorashim*, s.v. *'ayin–zayin–resh* and *nun–gimel–dalet*.

14. Ber. 61a.

15. Ramban was apparently referring to a debate outlined in his commentary on Lev. 12:2 between the Sages and "doctors" who believed that conception resulted from the mutual and substantive contribution of both male (sperm) and female (blood), and the Greek philosophers, who suggested that the physical substance came exclusively from the woman, with the male contributing the form.

Genesis 3:19

[After Adam and Eve ate of the tree of knowledge at the instigation of the serpent, each of the protagonists received their comeuppance in turn. In verses 17 to 19, God addressed Adam.]

3:19 "By the sweat of your face shall you eat bread until you arrive again in the earth from which you were taken, for you are dust and shall again return to dust."

Commentary

19. **by the sweat of your face** [*be-zeʿat apekha*]: this resulted from his great exertion [in making bread][1]—winnowing, grinding, kneading, and baking—and unlike the food eaten by animals,[2] as mentioned by our Sages: "Adam exerted himself greatly . . . ."[3] The meaning of *be-zeʿat* can be ascertained from our Sages;[4] the word [*zeʿah*] is formed on the pattern of *shenah* or *ʿeṣah*, and its root is *yud–zayin–ʿayin*, as in *they shall not gird themselves with anything causing sweat* [*ba-yazaʿ*] °(Ez. 44:18)—[meaning,] to the point of making them sweat.[5] [The first vowel in *zeʿat*] does not change to a *sheva* in the construct form as it does in the word *shenat* and *ʿaṣat*[6] so as not to elide the letter *ʿayin* which follows it.[7]

1. Rashi.

2. This part of the sentence was taken from Ibn Ezra.

3. Ber. 58a. The rabbinic reference was added by the *Beʾur* simply to buttress the exegetical point.

4. See, e.g., Ber. 57b; Gen. R. 20:10.

5. This sentence was again Ibn Ezra, absent the example of the word *ʿeṣah*, which was added with an eye to the next sentence taken from Ibn Melekh; see n. 7.

6. The letter *ʿayin* is vocalized with *ḥaṭaf paṭaḥ*, considered to be a compound or nuanced *sheva*.

7. The last point was from Ibn Melekh, who inferred it from a related comment in Radaq, *Sefer Mikhlol* (Venice, 1545), 59b.

your face [*apekha*]: this is a word used to refer to the face, and Scripture used it because the nose [*af*; pl. *apayim*] protrudes from the face.[8]

until you arrive again in the earth [*ʿad shuvekha el ha-ʾadamah*]: [he will return to the earth] outside of the Garden of Eden because from [that earth] he was taken, as Scripture goes on to explain when God expels him *from the Garden of Eden to work on the earth from which he was taken* (v. 23). Now, God decreed death upon him in this world so that his body would return to the dust from which it was created, and he would live the eternal life only after the departure of the soul from the body. The meaning of the curse for man is that before he ate of the tree of knowledge God brought him from the earth from which he was created and placed him in the Garden of Eden to cultivate it and to keep it with minimal toil, with ease and tranquility. And it was possible that he would live like this forever with no degeneration of the body, except that as he ate from the fruit of the Garden he would be slowly transformed until he became ever more purified and attained the rank of the incorporeal beings.[9] However, now that he ate of the tree of Knowledge and [the faculty of] desire overcame him, man's only good is to toil and exert [himself] and be preoccupied with the cultivation of the cursed earth. If man were to live at ease *and eat in excess and live in lust* (Deut. 31:20) he would turn his heart from the good and wander after his eyes and stray after them[10] and distance himself greatly from the hoped-for eternal felicity. As such, it is a great virtue for man to benefit from the effort of his hand, and that he eat his bread by the sweat of his face and great toil. This being the case, it is not possible for him to live an eternal life with such attributes, and if he would live a thousand years he would sometimes see nothing but *vanity and empty thoughts* (Ecc. 4:6). As such, it was divine grace that his body would return to its dust at the time allotted to him by his Creator, while his soul would return to God *to behold the goodness of the Lord in the land of the living* (Ps. 27:13). The curse was thus in itself [an act of] mercy and compassion on the part of the Gracious and Benevolent One, whose way is to punish only for the good of the sinner in order to benefit him with his ultimate end. The punishment that comes from Him, may He be exalted, is neither revenge nor an absolute evil, as our Sages said "Everything That God Does Is for the Good."[11]

8. Ibn Melekh, drawing upon Ibn Ezra to Gen. 19:1 and Radaq, *Sefer ha-Shorashim*, s.v. *aleph–peh*.

9. *ha-nivdalim*.

10. Alluding to Num. 15:39.

11. Ber. 60b. See above, *Qohelet Musar*, section 2, pp. 31–35.

Genesis 3:22

[The last three verses of Genesis 3, beginning with v. 22, serve as the denouement of the story.]

3:22 The Eternal Being God spoke: "now Adam is like one of us, to know good and evil. How easily he can stretch out his hand and take even from the tree of life and eat, that he may live forever."

Commentary

22. **The Eternal Being God spoke, "now Adam is like one of us . . ."** [*va-yoʾmer adonai elohim hen ha-ʾadam hayah ke-ʾaḥad mimmennu*]: Onqelos translated this as "behold, Adam has become unique[1] in the world, knowing good and evil by himself." This appears to be the view of Rashi and is based on Genesis Rabbah. Regarding this [interpretation] R. Elijah Mizrahi wrote that "the word *mimmennu* was thus conjoined with *to know good and evil*,[2] meaning that he knew good and evil by himself and on his own, with nothing constraining his freely chosen actions, as the Tannah stated: 'man is given leave to act freely.'"[3] Alluding to Onqelos, Ibn Ezra noted that "when the *alef* of the word *ʾḥd* [one] is vocalized with a *segol* [*eḥad*], it carries a [disjunctive] cantillation mark and is in the absolute form; but when vocalized with a *pataḥ* [*aḥad*] it is in the construct form, as in the example *like one* [*ke-ʾaḥad*] *of the tribes of Israel* °(Gen. 49:16). Therefore,[4] it is not grammatically possible to interpret the word as *eḥad* [i.e., unique], for what could this mean? [Moreover, if this were correct,] the

1. Reading the Hebrew word as *ke-ʾeḥad* and interpreting it as one-of-a-kind.

2. As Mendelssohn explained in the *Beʾur* to 2:9, Onqelos and Rashi determined that the word *mimmennu* was not to be read as referring back to God, but to Adam; this reading separated *mimmennu* from the word preceding it (forming the phrase *eḥad mimmennu*) and connected it with the clause that followed. See also Maimonides, *Mishneh Torah*, Teshuvah 5:1.

3. M. Avot 3:15.

4. That is, since our verse has *ke-ʾaḥad*, it must be read as a construct.

cantillation mark should have conjoined the word *mimmennu* with the word *to know* [that follows it]."[5]

. . . The meaning of these words, in line with our approach,[6] is that God said: Now Adam's faculty of desire has increased to the level of the angels on high, and he has thus destroyed the equilibrium between his mental faculties and was liable to fall into the pit of imagination and the conceits of illusory desire. Should he remain in the Garden of Eden now that he has this disposition and has leave and the choice of doing that which is good in his own eyes—**how easily he can stretch out his hand and take even from the tree of life and eat, that he may live forever**. The general purpose of creation will then fall through, for man will not attain the eternal felicity and the hoped-for good of all time. This is because eternal life in this world is not good or beneficial to man once he has corrupted his way on earth, and the best for him would be to withhold the fruit of the tree of life so that his body will return to its dust, just as he was.[7]

5. The *Be'ur* launched into a lengthy discussion of the grammatical and semantic meaning of *eḥad/aḥad*; stylistically and substantively this material appears to be Dubno's work and has been omitted here.

6. See the *Be'ur* to Gen. 2:9 above.

7. At this juncture the *Be'ur* included another grammatical discussion of the word *mimmennu,* which again appeared to be Dubno's work; it has been omitted.

SELECTIONS FROM EXODUS

Exodus 3:1–15

[Exodus 1–2 recounted the enslavement of the Israelites in Egypt, the birth and providential salvation of Moses, and his removal to Midian. Exodus 3 narrated God's initial call to Moses.]

3:1 Mosheh was tending the small livestock of his father-in-law Yitro, the priest of Midyan; he drove the flock down into[1] the desert, and came to the mountain of God, to Ḥorev.

Commentary[2]

1. **the mountain of God** [*har ha-ʾelohim*]: referring to [what would occur there in] the future.[3]

to Ḥorev [*ḥorevah*]: the mountain was called *ḥorev*, and the letter *heh* is added at the end of the word in place of the prefix *lamed*;[4] the word is therefore accentuated on the penultimate syllable.[5]

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2 There appeared to him an angel of the Eternal in a blazing fire out of the thorn-bush. He gazed, and there was the thorn-bush aflame, yet the thorn-bush was not consumed.

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1. Mendelssohn translated the phrase *aḥar ha-midbar* (lit.: "after the desert") as *die Wüste hinunter*.

2. The *Beʾur* to this chapter included a great deal of material that originated with Dubno and was set off from Mendelssohn's commentary with brackets; see *Or li-Netivah*, p. 296. This material has been omitted from this translation.

3. Rashi. The comment sought to explain the appellation "mountain of God" as a literary anachronism; it was based on Sifre to Deut. 1:14 § 22, which identified this mountain as the site of the future revelation, i.e., Mount Sinai.

4. The prepositional prefix *lamed* means "to."

5. Ibn Melekh.

Commentary

2. **the thorn-bush** [*ha-seneh*]: a variety of dry thorn; and such is its name in Arabic as well. Mount Sinai [*sinai*] was named for this bush,[6] maintaining the [original] pronunciation of the third radical.[7]

aflame [*boʿer ba-ʾesh*]: [the word *boʿer*] means "on fire," [whereas in the following verse] *why the bush is not burning up* [*yivʿar*] [the word means] burned and consumed; thus, Onqelos rendered the first *baʿir* and the second one *mitʾakhil*.[8] In the German translation, the first was rendered *brennen* and the second *verbrennen* or *verzehrt werden*.

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3 Mosheh thought, "I must surely go there and see this extraordinary sight—why is the thorn-bush not burning up?"

Commentary

3. **I must surely go there** [*asurah na*]: from the verbal root *samekh–resh*. If this word is followed by [the preposition] *mem* ["from"] it connotes distance, and so *suru mimmenni* °(Ps. 6:9) means "distance yourselves from me"; and if this word is followed by [the preposition] *el* ["to"] vocalized with a *segol*, the meaning is the reverse, as in *surah elai* °(Judg. 4:18) [i.e.,] "leave your place and come to me." And so in our case [the meaning is] "I must go from my place to the place of the thorn-bush."[9] In his *Sefer ha-Shorashim*, s.v. *samekh–vav–resh* Radaq wrote that on the face of it, *asurah na* appears to mean the opposite.[10] But the nuanced meaning indicates that it is one and the same, for [in our verse] there is a hidden *mem* conjoined with it, such that it reads "I must go *from my place*," and likewise [in v. 4], *that he had stepped aside to look* means "that he had gone *from his place* to look."[11]

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6. Ibn Ezra.

7. The last note was from Ibn Melekh, adding an etymological explanation regarding the contraction of the original triphthong in *sinai* to yield *seneh*.

8. Ramban, as condensed by Ibn Melekh. Many extant versions of Onqelos (and the original comment of Ramban) have the word *mitoqad* instead of *mitʾakhil*, although the Berlin 1705 Pentateuch has the text as Mendelssohn cited it here. The two Aramaic words, in any event, mean the same thing.

9. Ibn Ezra with slight editing.

10. Radaq noted that while *asurah na* would usually mean "to withdraw, to turn away," in our verse it would appear to indicate the opposite, i.e., "to draw closer."

11. The second half of this comment, including the reference to Radaq, was from Ibn Melekh.

4 When the Eternal saw that he had stepped aside to look, God called to him out of the bush: "Mosheh, Mosheh!" He answered: "Here I am."

Commentary

4. **When the Eternal saw** [*va-yar adonai*]: the angel is referred to by the name of his sender,[12] as per [the verse] *for My Name is in him* (Ex. 23:21); this is the explication of Ibn Ezra and Rashbam. Ibn Ezra offered another [explanation], that the Eternal saw that Moses turned aside to look and [then] commanded the angel to call out to him. For this reason our verse first uses the divine name that is unique to Him[13] and afterwards the name *elohim* [God], which is not a proper name but an adjective that includes any holy being that is neither corporeal nor a physical power.[14]

Mosheh, Mosheh: The call was repeated in order to hasten the one being called.[15]

5 He said, "Do not come closer; take off your sandals from your feet, for the place on which you stand is holy ground."

6 And He said further: "I am the God of your fathers, the God of Avraham, the God of Yiṣhaq, and the God of Yaaqov." Mosheh hid his face, for he was afraid to look at God.

Commentary

5. **closer** [*halom*]: that is, "to here."[16]

take off [*shal*]: its verbal root is *nun–shin–lamed*, on the pattern of *gaʿ*;[17] it means to remove and take out.[18]

12. In v. 2 it was an "the angel of the Eternal" that appeared to Moses, while this verse referred directly to God.

13. I.e., the Tetragrammaton.

14. Ibn Ezra elaborated on the names of God in his commentary on Ex. 3:15.

15. Ibn Melekh.

16. Radaq, *Sefer ha-Shorashim*, s.v. *heh–lamed–mem*, and Ibn Melekh.

17. Ibn Ezra and Radaq, *Sefer ha-Shorashim*, s.v. *nun–shin–lamed*. The comment pointed out that the masculine singular imperative *shal* is consistent with imperatives for other verbal roots with the letter *nun* as the first radical, as for example the root *nun–gimel–ʿayin* whose masculine singular imperative is attested in the verse *touch* [*gaʿ*] *the mountains* (Ps. 144:5). Radaq offered a different parallel.

18. Rashi.

7 The Eternal continued, "I have seen to[19] the distress of my people in Miṣrayim;[20] and I heard their outcry regarding their oppressors, for their afflictions are well known to Me."

8 "I have therefore condescended myself to deliver it from the might of the Miṣrim[21] and to lead it up, out of the land, to a good and spacious land flowing with milk and honey; to the place of the Kenaani, Ḥitti, Emori, Perizzi, Ḥivvi, and Yevusi peoples."

Commentary

7. **their outcry** [*ṣaʿaqatam*]: "I heard that they are crying out because they are being oppressed."[22]

for their afflictions are well known to Me [*ḳi yadaʿti et makhʾovav*]: this is like *and God knew* (Ex. 2:25), as if to say: "I was mindful to take note of their afflictions and did not ignore them."[23]

8. **I have therefore condescended myself** [*va-ʾered le-haṣṣilo*]: *the Glory of the Eternal fills* everything (Ex. 40:34); nevertheless, the language of descent was figuratively applied from a downward spatial movement to the notion of thought and watchfulness with regard to something lower and of lesser standing than the observer who turns his thoughts to it. There are likewise many scriptural instances where the language of descent is figuratively applied to God in this way, as the author of the *Guide* mentioned in his book and as we have written in his name in [our commentary on] Gen. 11:5.[24] Onqelos translated [the word *va-ʾered*] as "I revealed Myself" °(*ich bin erscheinen*); he too intended to distance corporeality from the splendor of God, may He be blessed.[25] However, if these are the words of the angel who spoke using the language of his sender,[26] there

19. Mendelssohn translated *raʾoh raʾiti* as *ersehen*, which can also mean to choose or to select; cf. the *Beʾur* to Gen. 22:8. The English "seen to" has tried to capture something of that meaning.

20. Egypt.

21. Egyptians.

22. Rashbam. The comment sought to clarify the awkward biblical syntax by reordering its words.

23. Rashi, but note Mendelssohn's revision. Rashi had written "I was mindful to understand and know their misery; I have neither hidden my eyes nor stopped my ears from their outcry," but Mendelssohn was clearly uncomfortable with Rashi's rather unself-conscious use of corporeal language with regard to God. For Mendelssohn's handling of the philosophical problem of God's knowledge, see the *Beʾur* to Gen. 4:1.

24. The reference was to *Guide* I:10.

25. See also *Guide* I:27.

26. I.e., God. This is the view of Ibn Ezra in his comment on v. 7; and see the *Beʾur* to v. 4 above.

may be no need for this [explanation] and the meaning is according to its plain sense: "I have descended here to speak with you in order to deliver [the nation] from the might of Miṣrayim" °(this was the interpretation of Rashbam).[27] The German word *herabgelassen* can also bear both interpretations cited.

a good land, etc. [*ereṣ ṭovah . . .*]: He first praised the land saying that it was good, indicating that the air was good and beneficial for people and that everything good was to be found in it; and that it was spacious, so that all of Israel would dwell there with open space. He then praised it as a land for herds, with good pasture, fine water, and plenty of cows' milk. And on account of the good pasture found in the meadows and in the highest mountains, where for the most part fruit do not grow very plump and nice, He said that land would be so rich that it would be flowing with the honey of its fruit. He thus praised it for *the bounty of the Eternal, for the new grain and wine and oil, for its sheep and cattle* (Jer. 31:12).[28]

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9 "Since the outcry of the children of Yisrael has reached me; and I have seen the distress which Miṣrayim caused them."

10 "So go, then—I will send you to Pharaoh; and you will lead my people, the children of Yisrael, from Miṣrayim."

Commentary

9. **Since the outcry of the children of Yisrael has reached Me** [*ve-ʿattah hinneh ṣaʿaqat bene yisraʾel baʾah elai*]: He already said *I heard their outcry* (v. 7), but the repetition of the word *ve-ʿattah*—[first in our verse as] *ve-ʿattah hinneh* [lit.: *and now behold*] and [again in the following verse] *ve-ʿattah lekhah ve-ʾeshlahakha* [lit.: *and now go and I will send you* (v. 10)]—indicates that the meaning is as we have translated: *Weil nun das Geschrei . . . So gehe denn also . . .*[29]

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11 Mosheh said to God: "Who am I that I should go to Pharaoh and that I should lead the children of Yisrael out of Miṣrayim?"

27. See also Rashbam to v. 4.

28. Ramban.

29. Mendelssohn's clarification is reflected in his translations of vv. 9–10. Ramban and Abarbanel had earlier noted the apparently superfluous nature of v. 9. Mendelssohn, however, shifted the exegetical issue by focusing specifically on the awkward repetition of the word *ve-ʿattah* [now] and suggested that the word served in v. 9 as a conjunctive preposition and in v. 10 as an adverb.

Commentary

11. **who am I** [*mi anokhi*]: who am I, of such little importance, to enter the king's court and to stand before him?[30]

and that I should lead [*ve-khi oṣi*]: even if I am worthy enough to enter the king's court and to speak with him, have I strength or power to free this vast nation from the hand of such a powerful monarch?[31]

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12 God[32] said: "I will be with you, and this serves as your assurance that it was I who sent you; when you will have led the people from Miṣrayim, you shall worship God on this mountain."

Commentary

12. **God said: "I will be with you"** [*va-yoʾmer ki ehyeh ʿimmakh*]: according to the arrangement of the cantillation in this verse, the [subsequent] phrase **and this serves as your assurance** does not refer to the latter part of the verse but its beginning.[33] As such, the worship on the mountain is not an assurance for Moses' dispatch, as most commentators explained.[34] Rather, God made two promises to him. With regard to his fear of standing before a great king, He said to him **I will be with you, and this**—the vision that you saw in the thorn-bush—is **your assurance that it was I who sent you** and that you will succeed in the mission on which I am sending you. I am able to save you; for just as you saw the thorn-bush acting at my behest without being consumed, likewise you will fulfill my charge and will incur no harm.[35] He then gave him another promise, that on this mountain, upon which he had this extraordinary and fearful vision, they would come to worship God; that Moses would offer a burned offering and sacrifices there; that Israel would receive the Torah; and that [on that very mountain]

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30. Combining and rephrasing Rashi and Rashbam.

31. Mendelssohn followed the medieval exegetes in noting that Moses raised two separate and distinct objections. Mendelssohn's explication reflected that of Rashbam, but with regard to the second objection articulated in this comment, Mendelssohn shifted its thrust from the improbability of Pharaoh's acquiescence to a statement regarding his utter lack of power in the face of Egyptian might.

32. The biblical text had "And he said" with no antecedent.

33. The antecedent of *this serves as your assurance* was unclear, so Mendelssohn took his exegetical cue from the positioning of the *etnaḥta*, the major pause in the verse, which was inserted where the semicolon appears in this translation.

34. Cf. Ibn Ezra, Ramban.

35. Rashi.

Moses would make a covenant with them to be God's treasured people, and He would be their God.[36]

when you will have led [*be-hoṣi'akha*]: according to the established rule °(see Ex. 11:1),[37] an infinitive with the prepositional prefix *bet* indicated the past tense,[38] while an infinitive with the prefix *khaf* indicated the future. As such, [the verse here] ought to have been written *ke-hoṣi'akha*.[39] However, one who pays careful attention to the correct understanding of the tenses knows that the word here refers not to the future alone but to a tense comprising the future and the past; the [people,] after all, would not worship God until after they left Egypt, and at that point, the exodus would be in the past. It is thus correct to have *be-hoṣi'akha*, and hence it is translated in German in the future perfect tense, *wenn du wirst heraus geführt haben* [*when you will have been led out*].

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13 Mosheh said to God: "When I come to the children of Yisrael and say to them 'the God of your fathers has sent me to you,' and they say 'What is His name?' what shall I say to them?"

Commentary

13. **and they say 'What is His name?'** [*ve-'ameru li mah shemo*]: '[what is] the Unique Name that fully indicates [His] existence and providence?'[40] For in their lengthy exile and subjugation, the Israelites had almost forgotten the holy names known to the nation from the days of the forefathers. They became like the other nations—who hold fast[41] *to the hosts and constellations of heaven* (Isa. 13:10) based on their own opinions, that there is no God other than them—with the exception of the tribe of Levi who remained faithful in its belief and never practiced idolatry, and for this reason merited the crown of priesthood.[42] Hence

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36. The explanation of the second promise is an edited reformulation of Ibn Ezra's comment, although it also accorded with an alternative explanation offered by Rashi.

37. Mendelssohn's reference was to his analysis of the word *ke-shaleḥo*, translated as "he will release."

38. In his *Be'ur* to Ex. 11:1, he noted that the prefix *bet* indicated both past and present.

39. I.e., in the future tense: "when you will take them out."

40. Ramban to v. 14. This medieval exegete ultimately understood the question posed by Moses and the subsequent answer by God to be about which of the rabbinically articulated binary attributes—justice or mercy—would define Moses' mission to the Israelites. In his comments here and in the verses that follow, Mendelssohn embraced the approach taken by Maimonides and others, but eschewed by Ramban, that both question and answer relate to the quest for a fundamental knowledge of God.

41. *ha-maḥaziqim*; Mendelssohn appears to be alluding, for ironic effect, to Isa. 56:4, 6, where the prophet speaks of those who "hold fast to my covenant."

42. The notion that the descendents of Jacob were in possession of a proper knowledge of God but then lost it in their long enslavement in Egypt, and that the Levites alone maintained

Moses said: "Now that Your Great Name has vanished and has been obscured from every nation and language, and they all worship other gods—if the Israelites say to me 'who sent you, and what is His name that indicates His truth, His eternity prior and posterior to time,[43] and that He governs and rules providentially over everything'—**what shall I say to them**?" °(See R. Joseph Giqatillah's *Ginnat Egoz*, part I, "On the Four-Lettered Name" who dealt with this at length, as per his habit to repeat statements numerous times.[44] And with regard to the difficulty he raised there against the author of the *Guide* pertaining to [the latter's] explanation of the words *ehyeh asher ehyeh*, this will be resolved in [the *Beʾur* to] verse 15 in a satisfactory manner.)[45]

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14 God spoke to Mosheh, "I am the Being that is eternal." He said further: "Say to the children of Yisrael, the Eternal Being which calls itself 'I am eternal' has sent me to you."

Commentary

14. **I am the Being that is eternal** [*ehyeh asher ehyeh*]: The midrash states: "The Holy One, blessed be He, said to Moses: 'Say unto them, I am He that was, I am

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this knowledge, was articulated by Maimonides in *Mishneh Torah*, ʿAvodah Zarah ch. 1, and drawn from rabbinic statements in Mekhilta and Sifre; see R. Nahum Rabinowitz, *Yad Peshuṭah* (Maʿaleh Adumim, 1984) 2:518–19. Mendelssohn's particular phrasing, however, and the idea (absent in this Maimonidean source) that the priesthood was merited because of this adherence to God, was drawn from the thirteenth-century *Ginnat Egoz* of R. Joseph Giqatilla, cited a few lines later in this comment; see the Zolkiew 1773 edition, 10b.

43. *qadmuto ve-niṣḥiyuto*. This phrase also appeared in Giqatilla's particular formulation, although Mendelssohn could also have drawn on the philosophical articulation of this idea in *ʿIqqarim*, II:18.

44. See n. 42.

45. In *Guide* I:63, Maimonides explained our verse in terms of Moses' recognition that the Israelites needed to have a true knowledge of God: "Accordingly, God made known the knowledge . . . through which they would acquire a true notion of the existence of God, this knowledge being 'I am that I am [*ehyeh asher ehyeh*]' (v. 14). This is the name deriving from the verb "to be" [*hayah*], which signifies existence, for *hayah* indicates the notion: he was. And in Hebrew, there is no difference between your saying: he was, and he existed. The whole secret consists in the repetition in a predicative position of the very word indicative of existence . . . Scripture makes, as it were, a clear statement that the subject is identical with the predicate. This makes it clear that He is existent not through existence . . . [He is] the existent that is the existent, or the necessary existent." Giqatilla critiqued this notion as failing to acknowledge the difference between the Tetragrammaton and *ehyeh*, that is, between "the Unique Name that indicates the truth of His eternity," since it alone is united with His essence, and *ehyeh*, "which indicates the truth of the emanations from the power of His essence." Giqatilla thus read these verses in light of his Kabbalistic understanding that regarded the other names of God as divine hypostases—in effect divine creations—that channel the divine essence into the cosmos and into the world. See *Ginnat Egoz*, 11a.

the same now, and I will be the same for the future to come.'"[46] Since past and future time are, for the Creator, all in the present—for with Him, *there is neither change nor fixed time* (Job 10:17) and His days never pass—therefore, in reference to Him all times are called by one name that encompasses past, present, and future. Through this [name] He indicates the necessity of [His] existence, and also indicates [His] ever-present and unceasing providence. It is as if with this Name He was saying: I am with mankind to be [full of] grace and to be *merciful with whom I am merciful* (Ex. 33:19).[47] Now then, inform the Israelites that I was, am, and will be the ruler and the one exercising providence over everything; *I, I alone am* (Deut. 32:39) and I will be with them *in all their troubles* (Isa. 63:9)—I will be with them in this [time of] trouble,[48] and I will be with them whenever *they call to Me* (1 Kgs. 8:52). Now in German there is no word that includes simultaneously all the tenses,[49] the sense of Necessary Existence, and the sense of Providence, as does this Holy Name י(*das ewige, notwendige, vorsehende Wesen* [the eternal, necessary, providential Being]). As such, we have translated it *der Ewige* [the Eternal], or *das ewige Wesen* [the Eternal Being].[50]

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15 God spoke further to Mosheh: "Say to the children of Israel: the Eternal Being, the God of your forefathers, the God of Avraham, the God of Yiṣhaq, and the God of Yaaqov sent me to you: this is my name forever, and this is the expression by which I will be remembered[51] in the future."

Commentary

15. **spoke further** [*va-yoʾmer ʿod*]: [God proffers] another name; it has the same meaning as the first, except that one reflects the language of [God] speaking about Himself, while the other is that of someone speaking about Him.[52]

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46. Exod. R. 3:6. The slight changes in wording reflected the citation of the midrash by Ramban.

47. This comment was largely drawn from Ramban with a small number of editorial changes and additions, although Mendelssohn adapted it to his own reading of these biblical verses. While Ramban's commentary went on to stress that God was here indicating the operative attribute of divine mercy, Mendelssohn extended his reading of v. 13 and cast God's response in broader terms, indicating the aspects of His essence that Moses would make known to the Israelites.

48. This last phrase is from Rashi, whose comment pointed specifically to the providential aspect of *ehyeh*.

49. I.e., past, present, and future.

50. See the *Beʾur* to Ex. 6:3 below.

51. *Denkwort*.

52. Or, more literally: "except that one reflects the language of first-person singular, while the other is that of third-person singular." This was drawn from Ibn Ezra, although it served Mendelssohn as a springboard for an altogether different explanation.

Nevertheless, there is a great and significant difference between them, since the Holy Name[53] has no vocalization, and is sometimes pronounced with the vocalization of *adonai*, and sometimes with the vocalization of *elohim*.[54] This indicates His hiddenness and concealment from all other intelligent beings who refer to Him with that name; and with reference to this the Sages expounded on the word **forever** [*le-ʿolam*]—that it was written without the *vav*,[55] suggesting that He concealed it, [as if saying] "my Name is not written the way I am called, etc."[56] This is because one cannot explicate the essence of God in articulate language, and it cannot be grasped except with the most refined subtlety of thought. The name *ehyeh*, however, is properly vocalized and is read as it is written, for the Sublime Being using this language apprehends His essence with perfect apprehension; this is because He is the one speaking and saying *ehyeh*, and He is the object of apprehension and the one who apprehends Himself.[57] Understand this, for it is a sublime distinction among these holy names, and I have not seen a single scholar who paid attention to this.

and this is the expression by which I will be remembered in the future [*ve-zeh zikhri le-dor dor*]: this refers back to **the God of Avraham, the God of Yiṣhaq, the God of Yaaqov** for the covenant with the forefathers will never be forgotten, and throughout all the generations, whenever they invoke the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, *God will hear and answer them* (Ps. 55:20) °(Ramban).

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53. I.e., the Tetragrammaton.

54. In the vast majority of instances, the Tetragrammaton was read aloud as *adonai* and vocalized accordingly with a *sheva* and *qamaṣ*; in a small number of cases, it was vocalized with a *ḥaṭaf segol* and *ḥiriq* and pronounced *elohim*. See, e.g., the different vocalizations in Gen. 15:2, 8 and in Deut. 3:24 and 9:26.

55. I.e., with defective and not *plene* orthography.

56. This combined Pes. 50a with Rashi's reformulated citation of that passage.

57. For a fuller discussion see *Beʾur* to Ex. 33:23 below. With regard to medieval sources, see Maimonides' *Mishneh Torah*, Yesode ha-Torah 2:10; and *Guide* I:68. Mendelssohn responded to Giqatilla's critique of Maimonides (see above, v. 13 and n. 45) by co-opting Giqatilla's emphasis on the substantive distinction between the Tetragrammaton and *ehyeh* without compromising Maimonides' philosophical notion of God as a necessary existent. Mendelssohn, however, omitted Giqatilla's notion of divine hypostases.

Exodus 5:22–6:9

[Exodus 4 and 5 described the return of Moses to Egypt and his direct entreaty to Pharaoh to free the Israelites. Pharaoh responded by making the conditions of their enslavement worse, and Moses realized that his intervention had only exacerbated the people's suffering.]

5:22 Mosheh returned to the Eternal and said: "My God! why did you make it so difficult for the people, why then did you send me?"

23 "Since I came to Pharaoh to speak in Your Name, he has made it more difficult for the people; but you have not delivered your nation."

Commentary

22. **Mosheh returned** [*va-yashov mosheh*]: to the place where he would speak with Him.

why did you make it so difficult for the people [*lamah hareʿotah la-ʿam ha-zeh*]: and if they are no longer fitting to be redeemed, why did you send me?[1]

23. **Since I came** [*u-meʾaz baʾti*]: from the time that I came.

he has made it more difficult [*heraʿ*]: this word is in the causative form and is a transitive verb; [it means that] he increased their difficulty, and so it is translated in German. Now, [this statement of Moses] is an astonishing thing: since God had twice informed Moses that the king of Egypt would not let them go until He performed all the miraculous signs about which He had instructed him,[2]

1. Both comments on this verse are taken from Rashbam.
2. See Ex. 3:19 and 4:21, as well as 4:28.

why would Moses protest and say **why did you send me . . . you have not delivered [your nation]**?[3]

I will copy the words of Ramban, which are all words of *favor and good intelligence* (Prov. 3:4): "In my opinion, Moses understood that God had told him that Pharaoh would not let them go immediately at His command, nor by sign and miracle, until He would perform His many wonders. But Moses thought that God would bring them upon Pharaoh in uninterrupted succession within a few days, and that when Pharaoh said *I do not know the Eternal* [*and will not let the people of Israel go*] (Ex. 5:2) [God] would issue the command to immediately perform the sign of the serpent before him but that he would not listen and [God] would smite him on that very day with the plague of blood, followed by all the rest of the plagues. But when Moses saw that three days had passed and Pharaoh increased their woes daily, and God neither rebuked him nor revealed to Moses what to do, then Moses thought that *it is a long time* (Jer. 29:28).

"It is possible that the scriptural story recounted here elapsed over a long period of time; for when the Israelite foremen were beaten[4] days passed before they spoke to Pharaoh himself and said *why do you deal thus with your servants?* (Ex. 5:15), since not everyone has the right to enter into the king's palace and speak to him face to face, especially the foremen of a people abhorrent to him. They thus suffered their toil and oppression for many days, and would *come before the king's gate* (Esth. 4:2) until their outcry was heard by the king and he commanded that they come and speak with him. And so, it is possible that Moses returned to the Eternal and said **why did you made it so difficult** many days after the foremen met him.[5] In Exodus Rabbah, the Sages said:[6] '*The taskmasters and the overseers of the people went out* [*and said to the people, "Thus says Pharaoh: I will not give you any more straw"*] (Ex. 5:10)—seeing that this was the decree, Moses went to Midian and stayed there for six months, while Aaron continued to dwell in Egypt; and at that time Moses [also] returned his wife and children to Midian.' The Sages also said:[7] '*They encountered Moses and Aaron* (Ex. 5:20)—after six months God revealed Himself to Moses in Midian and said to him *go back to Egypt* (Ex. 4:19).[8] So Moses came from Midian and Aaron from Egypt, and the Israelite foremen met them as they [= the foremen] were leaving Pharaoh's presence.' I also saw [the same point] in Midrash to Song of Songs:[9] '*My beloved is like a gazelle* (Song 2:9)—just as this gazelle appears and then reappears again, so too [Israel's] first redeemer appeared, then disappeared, and then reappeared

3. This question was posed by Ibn Ezra in his commentary to v. 22 and was then reformulated by Ramban; Mendelssohn combined elements of both.

4. See Ex. 5:14.

5. See Ex. 5:20.

6. Exod. R. 5:19.

7. Exod. R. 5:20.

8. The midrash suggested that at this juncture, God repeated the earlier command of 4:19.

9. Song R. 2:9.

again. For how long did he disappear? R. Tanhuma said: three months, as it is written *They encountered Moses and Aaron* (Ex. 5:20). R. Yehudah Beribi said: for periods of time, since the word encounter means from time to time.'

"And so, many days passed from when God spoke to [Moses] and his approach to Pharaoh. Hence, when Moses returned to the Eternal he said: **why did you made it so difficult for the people** by hurrying to send me before the time of redemption has come, for it was not proper to send [me] to [Pharaoh] until You were ready to deliver them. You have now made it difficult for them and have not delivered them, and if this is what You do to them, they will perish due to the difficulties that will overtake them. Therefore God answered him [in the next verse]: **soon**—in the time at hand—**you will see what I will do to Pharaoh** for I will not prolong it for him as much as you thought; *his time is close at hand, his days will not be prolonged* (Isa. 13:22)." These are Ramban's words.

6:1 The Eternal said to Mosheh: "you will soon see what I will do to Pharaoh; that He will remove them with a strong hand, and with a strong hand He will drive them out of his land."

2 God spoke further with Mosheh; and said to him: "I am the Eternal."

Commentary

2. **God spoke further with Mosheh** [*va-yedabber elohim el mosheh*]: °(The following is Rashi:) God spoke with him reprovingly for speaking critically when he said *why did you make it so difficult for the people* (Ex. 5:22)? [The meaning of the words] **and said to him: I am the Eternal**—[I am] faithful to reward those who walk before Me. I did not send you in vain, but rather to fulfill what I said to the patriarchs. We find that this expression [i.e., **I am the Eternal**] is interpreted in this way in a number of instances.

When it is uttered in the context of punishment, as in [*You shall not swear falsely by My name*] *profaning the name of your God: I am the Eternal* °(Lev. 19:12) [it means that God is] faithful to exact punishment. When it is written with regard to the [positive] fulfillment of precepts [*miṣvot*], as in *You shall faithfully observe My miṣvot: I am the Eternal* °(Lev. 22:31) [it means that God is] faithful to reward.

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3 "I appeared to Avraham, Yiṣhaq, and Yaaqov, as the all-powerful God,[10] but by my Essence,[11] which means boundless and ever-present, I was not known by them."

10. *Als Gott der allermächtigste*, translating *be-'el shaddai*.
11. *Wesen*. See above, Ex. 3:14.

Commentary

3. **I appeared**, etc. [*va-ʾera*]: I will copy most of Ibn Ezra's words here with additional commentary, some of which is taken from Ramban, who in this instance agreed with him and wrote that all his words on this matter are correct.[12] **I appeared**: the prophecy of the patriarchs came through night visions, which is why the word here is "I appeared."[13]

but by my Essence [*u-shemi yhvh* (lit: but my Name *yhvh*)] can be restated as "but by my Name [*u-vi-shemi*] *yhvh*," since the [prepositional prefix] *bet*[14] of *be-ʾel shaddai* [**as the all-powerful God**] applies to itself and to [the name that] follows.[15] The meaning of this is that I did not make Myself known to the [patriarchs] as I made myself known to you [Moses] through a clear lens, a knowledge that was *face to face* (Deut. 34:10).[16] For the patriarchs knew the Unique Name, but it was not made known to them through prophecy. Therefore when Abraham spoke with God, he said the Unique Name together with *aleph dalet*[17] or *aleph dalet* alone.[18] The revelation of the divine Presence to the patriarchs and His communication with them took place through the lesser attribute of justice, and He dealt with them through this [attribute]. With Moses, [God] conducted himself and was known to him through the attribute of mercy, which is indicated in his Great Name.[19] Moses, therefore, will not mention the name *el shaddai* from this moment onward, for the Torah was given in his Great Name, as it is written *I am the Eternal your God* °(Ex. 20:2 and Deut. 5:6).[20]

The meaning of [the name] *shaddai* is dominant and mighty °(see [Ibn Ezra's] explanation in his commentary on Gen. 43:14 with regard to this name).[21]

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12. Mendelssohn diplomatically omitted the rest of Ramban's sentence, wherein he wrote that Ibn Ezra "is like one who prophesies without knowing it," i.e., he was correct without fully understanding what he had said. Note also that this lengthy comment was deeply indebted to Ramban, with relatively few passages actually drawn from Ibn Ezra. Nevertheless, Mendelssohn credited Ibn Ezra with establishing the exegetical guideposts upon which Ramban built.

13. Ibn Ezra. The comment connected the verb *va-ʾera* to *marʾah*, a vision.

14. Meaning "with," "by," or "as."

15. This sentence reflected Ramban's brief paraphrase of Ibn Ezra.

16. This sentence paraphrased Ramban; the phrase "clear lens [*aspaqlariya ha-meʾirah*]" was rabbinic in origin (see, e.g., Yev. 49b) and indicated a qualitatively superior level of prophecy.

17. I.e., *adonai* (= my Lord), expressing respect and reverence but not limited to divinity; see Gen. 15:2.

18. See, e.g., Gen. 18:27, 30, 32.

19. That is, with the Tetragrammaton.

20. The sentences following n. 16 were drawn almost verbatim from Ramban, with some minor omissions.

21. See also the *Beʾur* to Gen. 17:1.

The intended meaning of the verse is as follows:[22] [God] appeared to the patriarchs by this Name [*el shaddai*], which indicates that He prevails over the natural order of things and impels them to the benefit of His chosen ones,[23] performing great miracles for them without upending the normal course of the world. He directed and diverted the laws of nature and the created order for the good of those perfect ones;[24] *in famine He redeemed them from death, in war, from the sword* (Job 5:20), and He gave them wealth and honor and all things good. This is like all the promises in the Torah with regard to blessings and curses. For it is only as a miraculous occurrence that man receives a reward for performing a commandment or [is stricken by] some evil as punishment for a transgression. If man is left to his nature[25] or to the natural order, he will not always receive that good or evil in this world on account of his deeds. But all this-worldly reward and punishment conferred by the Torah are miracles that are hidden from view; people will consider them as the natural order of the world, but in truth they are man's reward and punishment. °(It is for this reason that the Torah speaks at length about the promises that are of this world, and does not explain the promises regarding the soul in the world of souls. For the rewards for [good] deeds in this world are wonders that do not follow from the natural order of things,[26] while the existence of the soul in the world of souls and its cleaving to God is something fitting and that follows from[27] its nature, given that its *portion rests with God above* [Job 31:2][28] and it *returns to God who gave it* [Ecc. 12:7]).

I have already informed you[29] in [my *Beʾur* to] the pericope of Exodus °(3:14–15) of the meaning of the Exalted Name[30] [that begins with the letters] *yud heh*[31]

22. This explanation, and the entire paragraph (including the lengthy parenthetical comment) that followed, was also largely drawn from Ramban, with some notable additions and changes. See nn. 23–28.

23. *menaṣeaḥ maʿarekhot ha-toledot u-makhriḥam le-ṭovat beḥirav*; Mendelssohn reformulated Ramban's *menaṣeaḥ maʿarekhot ha-shamayim*, which in its medieval context meant something closer to "prevails over the heavenly (or: astral) order."

24. I.e., the patriarchs. This sentence was Mendelssohn's own insertion.

25. At this juncture, Ramban's comment read "If man is left to his nature or his astronomical constellation [*mazzal*], his deeds would neither enhance nor diminish him." Mendelssohn removed the reference to *mazzal* and inserted his own words to complete the sentence, the substance of which spoke to his abiding interest in the question of providential reward and punishment.

26. In his commentary, Ramban had written that the promises of reward and punishment in this world "are wonders that stand in opposition to nature [*ke-neged ha-toledah*]." Mendelssohn's reformulation, wherein he spoke of wonders "that do not follow from the natural order of things [*enam nimshakhim mi-maʿarekhet ha-toledot*]," aimed to attenuate the point.

27. Mendelssohn added the word *nimshakh*.

28. This scriptural allusion was added by Mendelssohn.

29. Mendelssohn now wrote in his own voice, extending the interpretations of Ibn Ezra and Ramban.

30. Cf. Deut. 28:58, where Mendelssohn translated *ha-shem ha-nikhbad* as *verherrlichten Name*.

31. I.e., the Tetragrammaton.

and a little of the sublime and important ideas incorporated in it, among them that God is the source of all being; that through His simple will[32] all that is generated comes into being; that He extends His constant providence to all existent things; that He is at all times Present for those who do His will, creating new things for them by changing the natural order.[33] For while an agent [acting] within nature can only act upon that which is in its power to effect, not so He who acts solely by will and on His wish alone, since He will not be constrained from doing *whatever He wishes* (Prov. 21:1).[34]

Now,[35] the patriarchs did not attain a level of preeminence such that they could cleave to God as did Moses, *with whom God would relate face to face* (Deut. 34:10). As a result, Moses could alter the nature of created things[36] and produce signs and wonders according to the will of God[37] that the patriarchs were not able to produce.

As such, Scripture may be restated as follows: Moses said two things: one, **why did you send me**, and two, **you have not delivered your nation** (above, 5:22–23). God answered the latter with **you will soon see what I will do to Pharaoh**, and with regard to the first He answered **I am the Eternal** (above, 6:1–2). I appeared[38] to the patriarchs with the might of My hand with which I prevail over the order of created things[39] and impel them to aid My chosen ones, but by my Name of *yud heh*—which indicates a constant and unceasing providence,[40] for My will is the source of all beings and through Me everything came into existence; that I am to be relied upon and am eternally present to create new

32. Mendelssohn used this philosophical term earlier in his introduction to *Megillat Qohelet*; see above, p. 134, and n. 41.

33. This last phrase appears in Ramban.

34. See *Kuzari* IV:3 and *'Iqqarim* II:26.

35. Mendelssohn here takes up the comments of Ibn Ezra, which are followed largely verbatim.

36. Mendelssohn substituted *ha-nivra'im* for Ibn Ezra's *'olam shafel*, the "lower world." For Ibn Ezra, the lower world was the sphere in which man—absent the Torah and a connection to the divine upper world—was subject to astral governance as determined by celestial positions at the moment of birth. Mendelssohn did away with this astrological theosophy as well as the strict medieval distinction between the celestial and sub-lunar realms.

37. The words "according to the will of God" were added by Mendelssohn.

38. At this juncture, Mendelssohn reverted to Ramban's commentary and cited one extended sentence, which he substantially expanded and revised. Compare the remainder of this paragraph to the original lines from Ramban's commentary: "God said to Moses: 'I appeared to the patriarchs with the might of my hand with which I prevail over the constellations and aid My chosen ones; but by My name of *yud heh* through which all existence came into being I was not made known to them, that is, to create new things for them by changing the nature-of-things; *therefore, say to the children of Israel, I am the Eternal* (v. 6)." The salient aspects of Mendelssohn's expansion will be noted below.

39. Mendelssohn replaced Ramban's "constellations" with the "order of created things."

40. Mendelssohn's insertion underscored yet again the central importance of divine providence to his notion of God.

things by changing the nature-of-things in order to reward those who walk before Me[41]—by this Exalted Name **I was not known by them** as I was known to you face to face. On account of this I sent you so that through you, this name would be made known in the world, as it says, *so say to the children of Israel, I am the ever-present Eternal Being* (below, v. 6).

The German translator was forced to render the Exalted Name according to the matter at hand, for there is no one word in German that encompasses all these sublime meanings as there is in Hebrew, as I informed you [earlier] in Exodus [3:14].

The words of the Sages—that God's response also had an intended secondary meaning—were also correct, according to the manner of *derush* which is close to the scriptural *peshaṭ*.[42] [According to this reading,] God also spoke words of reproof and rebuke to Moses, telling him: Now the patriarchs, whose level of preeminence in prophecy did not reach yours, and who perceived only *el shaddai*, believed in Me, and *I also established My covenant with them . . . and now I have heard the moan* (below, vv. 4–5) of their descendants on their account. You, all the more so—who has known Me by the Great Name through which I assured you—should trust in My [attribute of] mercy, and assure Israel with this Name that I will produce signs and wonders for [their] benefit.

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4 "I also established My covenant with them, to give them the land of Canaan; namely, the land of their sojournings, where they sojourned as foreigners."

5 "Now I have also heard the moan of the children of Yisrael, how Miṣrayim forced them to work; then I remembered My covenant."

6 "Therefore say to the children of Yisrael, I am the ever-present Eternal Being, I will remove you from under the burden of Miṣrayim [and] deliver you from their servitude; [I will] redeem you with outstretched arms and with great punishments."

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41. This last phrase repeated what had been cited above from Rashi's commentary (v. 2); this insertion reinforced Mendelssohn's point that the intervention in nature was specifically directed to matters of reward and punishment.

42. The reference was to San. 11a and Exod. R. 6:4, but the formulation of the rabbinic reading that follows was drawn almost verbatim from Ramban. Mendelssohn's embrace of this particular point is telling, since Ramban's comment countered Rashi's vocal dismissal of this rabbinic reading as incompatible with the scriptural *peshaṭ*.

Commentary

6. **I will remove you**, etc. [*ve-hoṣeʾti*]: He assured them that He will take them out of Egypt and that they will no longer suffer their heavy burden.

[and] deliver you from their servitude [*ve-hiṣṣalti etkhem me-ʿavodatam*]: The Egyptians will not rule over them at all, [with the Israelites not even] being subject to them from afar as a *servant under tribute* (Gen. 49:15).

[I will] redeem you, etc. [*ve-gaʾalti etkhem*]: He will inflict great punishments upon them, such that the Egyptians will say: "Here is Israel Your nation as ransom for our lives," for the meaning of the word *geʾulah* [redemption] is like that of *mekher* [transaction].[43] The meaning of the expression **with outstretched arms** is that His arm will be extended over them until He takes them out.[44]

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7 "I will take you to me for a people °(that is, to be My subjects) and to be your God; you will know that I am the boundless Eternal Being your God, who takes you out from under the burden of Miṣrayim.

8 "I will bring you to the land that I raised My hand in assurance to give to Avraham, Yiṣhaq, and Yaaqov; I will give this to you as an inheritance; I, the Eternal Being."

Commentary

7. **I will take you to me for a people** [*ve-laqaḥti etkhem li le-ʿam*]: [That is,] when you come to Mount Sinai and will accept the Torah, for there it says *you will be My special possession* °(Ex. 19:5).

you will know that I am the boundless Eternal Being [*viydaʿtem ki ani adonai*]: When I redeem you with outstretched arms before the eyes of all the nations, you will know that **I am the boundless Eternal Being** who produces new signs and wonders in the world, and that I am **your God** who did all of these for your sake.[45]

8. **that I raised My hand in assurance** [*asher nasaʾti et yadi*]: this means an oath, as when a man raises his hand heavenward and swears. This is like [the scriptural

43. The biblical term *geʾulah*, and its verbal root *gimel–aleph–lamed*, could refer to monetary redemption (see, e.g., Lev. 25:24).

44. All three comments on verse 6 were drawn almost verbatim from Ramban.

45. Both comments on this verse are from Ramban, although the second is somewhat edited.

verses,] *I raise My hand toward heaven* °(Deut. 32:40) and *as he lifted his right hand and his left hand to heaven* °(Dan. 12:7).[46]

I, the Eternal Being [*ani adonai*]: faithful to fulfill My promise.[47]

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9 Mosheh indeed spoke all this to the children of Yisrael; but they did not give him a hearing on account of shortness of breath and difficult work.

Commentary

9. **they did not give him a hearing** [*ve-lo shameʿu el mosheh*]: they did not listen to his words—not because they did not believe in God and in His prophet, but because of **the shortness of breath**—like a person overcome by his toil—and from the **difficult work**, since the taskmasters pressed them and did not give them a chance to hear [his] word and reflect upon it.[48]

46. Ibn Ezra, then cited by Ramban. The verses cited here link the gesture of raising one's hand heavenward with a declaration of oaths.

47. Ibn Ezra.

48. Based on Ramban, but with editing.

Exodus 15:1

[After their miraculous redemption from Egypt, Moses and the Israelites witnessed the equally miraculous destruction of Pharaoh's army in the sea. At this juncture, the biblical text paused from its narrative and presented an extended poem that glorified God and celebrated the divine salvation.]

15:1 Then Mosheh and the children of Yisrael sang this song to honor the Eternal. They said: "I will sing to the Eternal, highly exalted He appears; horse and driver He hurled into the sea."

Commentary

Commentator's note: Before I begin to explain the Song of the Sea I will preface it with some words on the subject of biblical poetry and its qualities.[1] I have already informed you[2] that prophetic or divinely inspired poems are not metered or reckoned according to a specific number of syllables with a fixed value assigned to them depending on their length, as is the case with poetry in Greek and Latin; nor [are they rendered according to] a meter of "pegs" and "syllables"[3] together with rhymed line-endings, which are customary with us today in He-

1. In writing this preface, Mendelssohn based himself upon the pre-modern Jewish discussion regarding the characteristics of biblical poetry. The primary sources were *Kuzari* II:70–74; Judah Moscato's sixteenth-century commentary on *Kuzari* titled *Qol Yehudah*; and *Me'or 'Enayim*, ch. 60. Mendelssohn had also studied (and appreciatively reviewed) the most important and influential eighteenth-century study of biblical poetics, Robert Lowth's *De sacra poesi Hebraeorum* (Oxford, 1753).

2. In the *Be'ur* to Gen. 4:23.

3. *yetedot u-tenu'ot*; the terms referred to short and long syllables: the *yated* consisted of a short vowel (which in classical Hispano-Hebrew quantitative poetry meant a *sheva na'*, *ḥaṭaf*, or a conjunctive *vav* with a *shuruq*) plus another vowel (all other vowels being considered long vowels), while a *tenu'ah* consisted of a single (long) vowel.

brew.[4] For such [metrical poems] have no benefit or virtue other than euphony for the listening ear, and even this only applies to a straightforward recitation and not when it is sung. On the contrary: the skilled musician would weary of that [metrical] precision and would often need either to swallow some syllable with his vocal melody, or to lengthen a short [syllable] and shorten a long one, in order to efface the syllabic structure and to muddle the precise [metrical] arrangement in an undue manner; for one who sets a poem to song takes no pleasure in the quality and proportion experienced with the cadence of the words, as is known to any expert in that art. This is quite apart from the poetic license that the [metrical] precision forces upon the author of a poem, since in order to preserve the [metrical] arrangement that he had selected, he would sometimes need to violate the intended meaning of a passage, to distort it, to add to or take something away from it, or to exchange one word for another that is less fitting for its intended meaning, as is known. But the benefit of euphonic reading is not worth the damage to the meaning and the content, which is the purpose of speech. [Furthermore,] you will find that if a metrically constructed poem is translated from one language to another it is like fine oil poured from a vessel,[5] or a vessel [of oil] whose fragrance dissipates and is lost; that euphony would likewise be lost in its entirety, for syllabic meter is intimately connected to a [particular] language and adheres to it. The translator would only be able to offer straightforward prose, absent all fixed metrical values and arrangement; and of all that precision with regard to the fixed number and meter of syllabic values, nothing would be evident in translation except the shortcomings of the poem, namely the need for poetic license that pressed its author to compromise his intended meaning, as we mentioned.[6]

It would appear that for all these [reasons] our ancient predecessors abandoned this inferior virtue and chose a more worthy one, namely the arrangement of the subjects and clauses in a manner suitable to and directed at its desired aim, so that the words might enter not only into the listener's ear but also

4. Mendelssohn was broadly describing two different kinds of quantitative meter. The reference to Hebrew poetry "customary with us today" was to the mode of Hebrew poetry that took root in the tenth century under the influence of Arabic metrical poetry, and which continued to hold sway down to the early modern era. De' Rossi, citing Abarbanel's discussion of Hebrew poetics in his commentary on Isa. 5:1, also referred to this poetic style as "customary among us today." See *Me'or 'Enayim*, ch. 60, 181a.

5. Mendelssohn might have had in mind the midrashic reading of *Your oils are a sweet fragrance, your name is as poured oil* (Song 1:3), with regard to which Lev. R. 3:7 explained that God poured Torah into His nation "just as oil is poured from one vessel to the other, and no sound is heard." Appropriating the midrashic metaphor rather literally, Mendelssohn made the point that the distinctive sound of a poem is lost in translation.

6. The argument regarding the untranslatability of metrical poetry as further evidence of its inferiority was made earlier in *Me'or 'Enayim* and repeated in Lowth's *De sacra poesi*, Lecture III; see above, n. 1.

into his heart, and that they would remain *engraved upon its tablets* (Ex. 32:16). [They sought] to elicit joy or sadness, faint-heartedness or confidence, fear or hope, love or hate—whatever was appropriate to the intended meaning, and to establish honorable traits and excellent qualities in the individual *like goads and implanted nails* (Ecc. 12:11), a stake that would not be moved.[7] In light of that need and purpose there is great benefit to poetic euphony and melodic charm, as is known to those expert in psychology,[8] and thus they chose to compose their exalted *melişot* with an arrangement that was fitting and designed for music. And in conjunction with the variety of melodic arrangements and the operation of different instruments as per the number of strings, their tone, and their apertures—*lyre and lute, timbrel and flute* (Isa. 5:12), a string instrument,[9] cymbals [etc.][10]—they varied the names of the poems, such as *menaṣeaḥ*, *maskil*, *mizmor*, *shir*, *mikhtam*, and others.[11] There was likewise a change in the arrangement of the subjects and their constituent parts, as is fitting.

These melodies were forgotten due to the length of the exile, and due to the many afflictions and dislocations that entire marvelous art was lost to us: the crafting of instruments and their forms, and the system of sounds, melodic variations, and musical euphony, regarding which the notables of our nation prided themselves. All that remained for us were the names of the instruments and the poems, mentioned mainly in the book of Psalms,[12] *the sweet songs of Israel* (2 Sam. 23:1). However, we know that this art was once widely disseminated in the nation, and the notables among the people and its wise men and prophets were adepts at poetry and well practiced in song, and highly skilled in that art. They used it to arrange the parables and allegories, the [statements of] rebuke and prophecies and the praises of God, that He wanted the nation of God to hear, as *the spirit of the God seized them* from above (1 Sam. 10:6). Do not compare the art of music as we have it today to the magnificent art utilized by those consummate [predecessors], for there does not appear to be any comparison at all. What befell the art of poetry also befell the art [of music]: the virtue of ideas and thought in which rests the perfection of the rational soul has been abandoned in favor of a virtue of sound—which only makes for sensual enjoyment and aural enchantment—whose main preoccupation is sensual pleasure, as is known to those who have mastered that art. In the days of old, by contrast, the art and aim [of music] was to subdue the faculties of the soul, to control its ethical behaviors, and to alter its dispositions according to its will.

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7. See Giṭṭ. 17a.

8. *ḥokhmat ha-nefesh*.

9. *minnim* (Ps. 150:4), which Mendelssohn translated as *Saitenspiel*.

10. Mendelssohn listed a dozen other instruments mentioned in Psalms, among them stringed and wind instruments.

11. These were all drawn from Psalms; see, e.g., Ps. 3:1, 4:1, 16:1, 32:1.

12. Mendelssohn had this as *sefer tehillot*, the book of praises.

In order to direct the words of a poem toward that end as well,[13] they divided each and every utterance into parts and separated them into short clauses of almost equal quantitative value, such that you will not find a clause of more than four or less than two words °(not counting small or hyphenated words); most of them are [comprised of] three each. In simple prose, there is no set number of words in each clause, and you will find clauses of ten words or more followed by one of two words, without any [particular] arrangement. They did this for two reasons: first, since the clauses are short, there are more pauses and rests, and the greater number of rests is of great benefit in evoking the intended meaning and strengthening it in the mind, as masters of language have noted. It is likewise helpful for memory, for if a short clause is substantive and understood and absorbed by the mind, it is easy to retain by heart and repeat regularly over time. The second reason concerns the utilization of the melody; if one sings a long phrase out loud accompanied by musical instruments, the meaning will be distorted and the listener will comprehend only with great effort, which is not the case with a short clause. However, their entire aim was to preserve the meaning and arouse one to it. . . .[14] You see that although we have in our age lost the musical expertise of ancient times and no vestige of the musical craft practiced by our ancestors has remained—we lack even the correct ways of enunciating and pronouncing the syllables—nonetheless, there remains great appeal in sacred poetry, which is felt by any intelligent reader even if he does not comprehend its source. That appeal does not belong to the ear alone, connected and attached to the language in which it is based, as we mentioned above with regard to poetic meter. Rather, it is substantively pleasing, connected to the import and intended meaning of the statement [and] not with the enunciation of the lips and the sound of the voice. As such, although a translation dulls the magnificent taste and spoils the fragrance of sacred poems rendered in another language, they nevertheless retain the substantive appeal that we mentioned, [namely] in the arrangement of the statements and the division of phrases in a way that is pleasant and sweet for the palate, and agreeable to the listener's soul. The poetic majesty is not spoiled at all, as happens with the translations of foreign poems.

The matter of the division of poetic expressions into short clauses was already mentioned by the author of *Me'or 'Enayim* in the sixtieth chapter of *Imre Binah*, in which he cited the opinions of various scholars on poetic meter in Hebrew.[15]

13. That is, to shape and direct the soul.

14. Mendelssohn went on to add another advantage that pertained to the multi-part choral singing of these poems. Six lines have been omitted.

15. That is, on the question of whether Hebrew poetry was written according to some metrical system. The scholars cited by de' Rossi were (in this order) Abarbanel, Philo, Josephus, Jerome, and Moses Ibn Habib.

I shall cite his language briefly and with some minor changes, as is my way. He wrote:[16]

> My heart tells me that the sacred poems that we have mentioned undoubtedly have measures and structures, but they are not dependent on the number of complete and incomplete syllables,[17] as in the poems now common among us; they are, in the words of the *Kuzari* °(toward the end of part II), practices of Arabic poetry through which our language was distorted.[18] Rather, their structure and measures are [found] in the number of ideas and their parts, [in their] subject and predicate and whatever is connected to them, in every written sentence or clause. There are cases in which the clause contains two measures, and together with the second clause that is attached and connected to it, there will be four. . . .[19] For example, *Your-right-hand, O-Eternal* (Ex. 15:6) is a clause unto itself comprised of two units, or if you will, two measures °(he was referring here to the units regularly used by gentile poets called *metra* in Latin, which means measures, and in German it is called *Füsse*—feet). [That biblical verse continues with] *glorified by-power*, which is the same [as the first clause] and attached to it, and together they make four. Likewise, the second [part of the same verse], *Your-right-hand, O-Eternal*, has two other [measures] and *shattered the-enemy* another two, which together are four. In the same manner *The-enemy said, I-pursue, I-overtake, I-divide the-spoil; my-spirit shall-be-filled-of-them, I-draw my-sword, my-hand destroyed* (Ex. 15:9) and *You-blew with-your-breath*, etc. (Ex. 15:10). °(Almost all of the Song of the Sea is constructed according to this arrangement.) . . .
>
> With regard to a few [biblical] passages, the intelligent reader must recognize a few words that for whatever reason are not included in the enumeration of these measures, as in the song of *haʾazinu*, *And-He-said, "I-will-hide my-Face from-them"* (Deut. 32:20) in which the word *And-He-said* [*va-yoʾmer*] is an utterance unto itself, and as such, *"I-will-hide my-Face from-them"* constitutes three measures, [and the continuation of the verse] *and-see what their-end-is* are another three, and so forth. And likewise the two occurrences of the Tetragrammaton in Habakkuk's prayer in the verse *O Eternal, I have learned*, etc. (Hab. 3:2), which appear as a vocative; each of them stands alone, and so the clauses in which they are located are three-three.[20] For you should not count the syllables or the words with precision, but only the ideas and the discernible thoughts. And in this regard, it often happens that a short word will be conjoined to one next to it and is not included

16. The translation of this passage of de' Rossi owes much to the work of James Kugel and Adele Berlin; see the Editors' Introduction to part IV, Notes on the Translation.

17. That is, syllables comprised of long and short vowels.

18. Mendelssohn emended de' Rossi's text, changing *she-nishtabesh mi-leshonenu* to *she-nishtabesh ba-hem leshonenu*; it was thus not a point about the inferiority of Arabic but about the deleterious effect of Arabic poetry on Hebrew literature.

19. The citation from *Meʾor ʿEnayim* goes on to mention poetic passages organized in units of three metrical measures; both here and below, we have omitted some of the discussion and examples that merely illustrate the point already made.

20. At this juncture, Mendelssohn himself omitted a few lines of *Meʾor ʿEnayim*.

in the count.[21] Likewise, verses from the Psalms adhere to the arrangement that we mentioned,[22] and so too Solomon's Proverbs, *wisdom cries-aloud in-the-streets, raises her-voice in the squares*, etc. °(Prov. 1:20). °([This is the case] even though, as we have mentioned, Solomon did not have musical purposes in mind with regard to his proverbs, seeing that he did not arrange them to be sung. Nevertheless, he fashioned them in a poetic manner for other reasons already mentioned, that the intended meaning be aroused and strengthened in the listener's mind in order to augment memory and determination.)

It does not escape my attention that one will find many verses that I am unable to fit into the [poetic] modes just mentioned, and perhaps the exceptions outnumber the norm. °(While asking forgiveness from the honored scholar [de' Rossi], I think otherwise. The norm is without doubt vastly more prevalent. Perhaps he wanted to include only clauses of three measures, with the two connected [clauses] comprising six measures together, thereby intending to equate sacred poetry with the meter employed in Greek and Latin poems, which largely did not exceed six measures—known as the hexameter. But why was he compelled to do this, since this practice was merely conventional, in accordance with what was suitable to the nature of the language that they employed? The masters of sacred poetry had a different approach, as we will mention below; they sometimes employed clauses of four measures in keeping with what was appropriate to the meaning. I will express my view on this shortly.) As such, following the lines of my presentation, intelligent individuals may be enlightened and proceed to find that which I did not grasp. In any event, we ought to believe that all the songs found in Scripture—the Song of the Sea and of the well,[23] *ha'azinu*[24] °(the blessings of Jacob[25] and Moses,[26] the parables of Balaam,[27] and other short poems in the Pentateuch), the song of Deborah[28] and the song of David,[29] and the books of Job, Proverbs, and Psalms, °(and Song of Songs and Jeremiah's Lamentations)—all of them undoubtedly adhere to an arrangement and structure of one kind or another, or incorporate different measures.

These were the words of the scholar [de' Rossi].

Know, that what he mentioned with regard to one poem incorporating different measures, this too was not merely accidental or by happenstance, but rather [the result] of particular intention, since the more stirring the clause and

21. Note Mendelssohn's additions to de' Rossi's text, here underlined: "You should not count the syllables or the words with precision, but only the ideas and the discernible thoughts. And in this regard, it often happens that a short word will be conjoined to one next to it and is not included in the count."

22. Mendelssohn omitted the examples cited by de' Rossi.

23. Num. 21:17–18.

24. Deut. 32:1–43.

25. Gen. 49:1–27.

26. Deut. 33:1–29.

27. Num. 23:7–10, 18–24; 24:3–9, 15–23.

28. Judg. 5.

29. 2 Sam. 22:1–23:7.

exalted the *meliṣah*, the shorter the clauses. This was done in order to increase the pauses and vocal rests and to evoke the intended meaning in the mind of the listener, as we have mentioned. . . .[30]

You should understand that the connection and linking of hemistichs has a great purpose beyond understanding their [individual] meaning, for doubling some matter will highlight the meaning and will expose all its aspects such that nothing in it will remain hidden or obscure; by these means, the teaching will be clear, open, and transparent for the listener. You will also find that [such doubling] is very useful for euphony, for if the song is chorally sung by section, and you imagine that when one group sings a hemistich and the second one sings its linked pairing with a melody similar or in harmony to it according to what is appropriate, this yields great euphony and delight for the soul. By these means, the listener's spirit would be roused to conform to the matters and to internalize them in his mind. They will strengthen and control his desires and master the faculties and attributes of his soul, to divert them to all that it desires and to thoroughly alter its characteristics and its temperament, as we have mentioned.

Our Sages have already discussed the division of [biblical] poetry according to its parts.[31] In the tractate Sotah ˚(27b), they were divided as to how they sang at the Sea.[32] One argued that Moses said *I will sing to the Eternal* and Israel said *I will sing to the Eternal*; Moses said *highly exalted He appears* and Israel responded *I will sing to the Eternal*, and they responded in this manner to each and every clause.[33] Another Sage stated that Israel repeated whatever Moses said, as when a minor leads the Hallel:[34] Moses said *I will sing to the Eternal* and Israel responded *I will sing to the Eternal*; Moses said, *highly exalted He appears* and Israel said *highly exalted He appears*. R. Nehemia said: [they sang the Song of the Sea] like a schoolteacher reciting the *shemaʿ* in the synagogue.[35] Moses said *Then Israel sang* (Ex. 15:1) ˚(thus is the version in the Tosefta, that Moses said to Israel *Then Israel sang*[36]) and Israel said *I will sing to the Eternal* (ibid.); Moses said *my strength, my song* [*is Yah*] (ibid., v. 2) and Israel said *this is my God, I will glorify*

30. At this juncture, Mendelssohn offered myriad examples wherein different poetic measures are used for varying effect.

31. I.e., hemistichs.

32. The reference provided by Mendelssohn was to the Talmudic citation of the Mishnah; the rabbinic discussion that he merely paraphrased here was in Sot. 30b.

33. Turning *I will sing to the Eternal* into a recurring refrain.

34. The reference was to Ps. 113–118, recited as a thanksgiving prayer on the New Moon and most festivals as part of the morning liturgy.

35. The *shemaʿ* was comprised of three short sections of the Pentateuch and served as a central component of the daily liturgy. Mendelssohn understood R. Nehemia to be saying that a schoolteacher would prompt his pupils, who would then move ahead and recite the next clause, rather than merely repeating a refrain. Cf. Tan. *Be-Shallaḥ* [§ 11].

36. This version appeared in some manuscript and early printed editions of T. Sot. 6:2(3).

Him (ibid.); Moses said *The Eternal is a master of war* (ibid. v. 3) and Israel said *Eternal Being is His name* (ibid). In Mekhilta the Sages said:[37] "R. Eliezer ben Taddai says: Moses would begin with his words first, and Israel responded after him and then finished [the verse] with him. Moses would begin *I will sing to the Eternal, highly exalted He appears*, and Israel would say *horse and driver He hurled into the sea*. Moses said *my strength, my song* [*is Yah*], and Israel responded after him *He is become my salvation* (ibid., v. 2). Moses would begin *The Eternal is a master of war*, and Israel responded after him and finished [the verse] with him, *The Eternal is a master of war, Eternal Being is His name*."

It would appear, then, that the Levites singing as groups in the Temple did so in this manner. In instances where the subject is repeated within a verse they did as R. Nehemia, like the schoolteacher reciting the *shemaʿ*, singing one [hemistich] and then the other [and repeating] the matter in different words, as we mentioned. Where there is no overt repetition, they repeated each and every verse like a minor leading the Hallel, such as our custom of reciting Psalm 118 from verse 21 to the end, wherein we repeat verses whose subject is not repetitious; perhaps the custom was established in remembrance of what transpired in the Temple. . . .[38]

I have already gone beyond the bounds of my intention; I have exceeded the firm limits that I set for my commentary, not to go on at length with learned excurses. I did this out of love for the subject, since I have not found sufficient discussion of this matter among any of the biblical commentators. I also wanted to make the reader aware of the glorious beauty of the poems in the books of Scripture. For I noticed that our Jewish youth *satisfy themselves with the product of foreigners* (Isa. 2:6)[39] and take much pride in the poetry of alien nations, as if th[ose nations] had been given the splendor of poetry and the grace of its structure. A fire of indignation burned within me to show that *as heaven is high above the earth* (Ps. 103:11), so the modes of sacred poetry exceed the secular poetry [of other nations]. This is true not only with regard to the virtue of the poet—the agent[40]—or the precious and distinguished *meliṣot*—the material of the

37. Mekh. *masekhta de-shirah*, section 1.

38. At this point, Mendelssohn offered another three pages of examples comprised of three and four hemistichs.

39. While the verse read *yalede nokhrim*, lit.: "the children of foreigners," Mendelssohn interpreted it in line with Radaq and Maimonides (*Guide* I:7) who rendered it as a metaphorical reference to the ideas or books produced by foreigners.

40. Here and in what followed, Mendelssohn employed the classical articulation of the fourfold causes of things—matter, form, agent, and purpose; cf. his discussion in *Beʾur Millot ha-Higgayon*, ch. 9. For earlier examples of the application of these causes to biblical literature, see Abarbanel's introduction to the Former Prophets and the introductions to the Five Scrolls printed in Isaac Arama's *ʿAqedat Yiṣhaq* (subsequently shown to have been the sixteenth-century work of Joseph b. David ibn Yahya).

poem—or the guidance toward eternal well-being and true felicity by means of exalted and sublime matters, such as the prophecies, promises, blessings, and praises of God that lead man to eternal life—this being its aim. But with regard to its form as well, namely the organization of the clauses, their composition and arrangement—in this respect too, sacred poetry is vastly superior and has considerable excellence in splendor and beauty [in comparison] to all the other poems that others view as so praiseworthy.

Exodus 19:1–6

[Exodus 19 served as the prelude to the revelation at Sinai and included a statement of Israel's special relationship with God.]

19:1 In the third month after the exodus of the children of Yisrael from the land of Miṣrayim; on the first day of the month, they came to the Sinai desert.

2 That is, they set out from Refidim, and came into the Sinai desert and encamped in the desert; Yisrael encamped there over against the mountain.

Commentary

1. **on the first day** [*ba-yom ha-zeh*]: on the day that the month began, and so reads the German translation.[1]

2. **they set out from Rephidim** [*va-yisʿu me-refidim*]: Scripture first spoke generally, that they came on the first of the month to the Sinai desert, and now [in our verse] it explained how it came about, as is the manner of scriptural narrative.

and encamped in the desert [*va-yaḥanu ba-midbar*]: that being the Sinai desert.[2]

over against the mountain [*neged ha-har*]: this is the mountain mentioned earlier, [when Scripture foretold] *you shall worship God on this mountain* °(above, 3:12) °(Rashbam). The reason that the verse says **Yisrael encamped there** [*va-yiḥan sham yisrael*] after Scripture had already said **and [they] encamped in the**

1. The biblical *ba-yom ha-zeh* could be simply rendered as "on this (or: that) day," but rabbinic texts identified that day as the first of the month, and the medieval exegetes followed suit.

2. Ibn Ezra.

desert is that the heads of the tribes and the elders facing the mountain camped according to the [degree of] honor [due to them]; thus, the verse used *va-yiḥan* [in the singular] because they were [relatively] few in number. This was because at the time that the Torah was given they stood around the mountain according to their stature °(Ibn Ezra).

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3 Mosheh went up onto the mountain before God; and the Eternal called to him from the mountain and said: "So shall you say to the house of Yaaqov, and declare to the children of Yisrael."

4 "You have seen what I did to Miṣrayim; I have carried you on eagles' wings, I have brought you to Me."

Commentary

3. **Mosheh went up**, etc. [*u-mosheh ʿalah*]: From the day they arrived at Mount Sinai the cloud covered the mountain and God's glory was there, as it is written *Since the glory of the Eternal rested upon Mount Sinai and the cloud covered the mountain for six days* °(Ex. 24:16), [those being the six days] before the giving of the Torah. Scripture indicates that **Mosheh went up onto the mountain before God** [meaning] to the edge of the mountain, in order to be ready for Him, but he did not approach *the heavy cloud where* the glory of *God was* (Ex. 20:18). Then **the Eternal called to him from the** top of the **mountain, and said: "so shall you say to the house of Yaaqov."**[3]

4. **you have seen** [*attem reʾitem*]: this is neither a received tradition, nor something I conveyed to you in words or by witnesses that I set [before you]; rather, **you** [yourselves] **have seen** °(Mekh.).[4]

I carried you [*va-ʾesa etkhem*]: Onqelos translated [the word] *va-ʾesa* as if it were *va-ʾasiʿa*—"I caused you to be carried"; he emended the phrase out of respect for heaven.[5] But the German translator maintained the scriptural *peshaṭ* in order to preserve the literary quality of the expression, like an eagle carries its fledglings.

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3. Ramban. According to this reading of the verse, Moses only went as far as the foot of the mountain, with God calling to him with instructions for the nation. The sequence of events, or more precisely, the question of whether the divine glory descended before or after the revelation recorded in Ex. 20, was discussed by Mendelssohn in his *Beʾur* to Ex. 24.

4. The comment is based on Mekh. *masekhtade-ba-ḥodesh*, section 2, but the precise wording employed here combined it with Rashi's slightly different formulation.

5. Rashi. In the Berlin 1705 Bible, the text of Onqelos (and its citation in Rashi) had *ve-ʾaṭelit yatkhon*, not *ve-naṭelit* or *u-neṭalit* as found in many other editions.

on eagles' wings [*ʿal ḳanfe nesharim*]: like this eagle who carries his fledglings on its wings in order that no harm befall them, and in this way crosses seas, so too I have taken you across the sea, and you were not harmed.[6]

I have brought you to Me [*va-ʾavi etkhem elai*]: Onqelos translated this as "brought you near to My service," but according to the scriptural *peshaṭ* and context, [the verse is saying] **I have brought you to Me** *that you would be My* specially possessed *nation and I will be your God* (Jer. 11:4).

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5 "You shall thus obey My voice and keep My covenant; then you will be My special possession among all the nations, for the entire earth is mine."

6 "You will, however, be for Me a priestly kingdom and a holy people; these are the words that you shall speak to the children of Yisrael."

Commentary

5. **and keep My covenant** [*u-shemartem et beriti*]: that I will make with you regarding the observance of the Torah.[7]

special possession [(*le-ʿam*) *segullah*]:[8] this has the same meaning as *treasures of* [*segullat*] *kings and provinces* °(Ecc. 2:8).[9] Just as kings set aside some portion of their dominion for their own use and their own needs and cherish it more than other parts of their land—and something cherished by an individual is called a *segullah*—you will likewise be **My special possession among all the nations, for** in truth, **the entire earth is mine**. [To be sure,] all the nations are mine, and the entire human species is more precious to Me than all the [other] existent beings of the lower world, for [from among all those existents,] that species alone was the intention [of creation], as the Sages said, "Beloved is man, for he was created in the image of God."[10] [So too] the pious among the gentile nations are without a doubt precious to Him °(Sforno).[11] However,

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6. This comment combined Rashi and the notion of God's protectiveness with Rashbam, who read this verse as referring back to the miraculous crossing of the Sea of Reeds.

7. Rashi.

8. The verse has *segullah mi-kol ha-ʿammim* and not *ʿam segullah*, which only appears later in Deuteronomy (see, e.g., Deut. 7:6); this was presumably an error.

9. Rashi and Nachmanides both cite this verse.

10. M. Avot 3:14.

11. The section drawn from the commentary of Sforno began with the words "the entire human species is more precious . . ."

6. **you will be for Me a priestly kingdom** [*ve-ʾattem tihiyu li mamlekhet kohanim*]: all the peoples are like a [single] nation, and you are like the priests set aside to serve God, to understand and to teach the entire human species *to invoke the Eternal by name and to serve Him as one* (Zeph. 3:9), as will be Israel's task in the future, as the prophet said *You will be called priests of the Eternal* °(Isa. 61:6)° (Sforno).[12] Rashi and Rashbam explained *kohanim* as officers, as it is written *and David's sons were officers* [*kohanim*] °(2 Sam. 8:18).

a holy people [*ve-goy qadosh*]: separate and detached [from others, in order] to cleave to God.[13]

these are the words [*elleh ha-devarim*]: neither more nor less.[14]

12. The section cited from Sforno began with the words "to understand and to teach." Mendelssohn, however, replaced Sforno's citation of *for instruction* [*torah*] *shall come forth from Zion* (Isa. 2:3) with his own more universalist prooftext from Isaiah.

13. Combining Mekh. *masekhta de-ba-ḥodesh*, section 2, with Ramban.

14. Rashi.

Exodus 20:1–14[1]

[Exodus 20 opened with the Decalogue.]

20:1 Then the Eternal spoke all these words, as follows:

2 I am the Eternal your God; who led you out of the land of Miṣrayim, out of the house of slaves.

Commentary

2. **I am the Eternal your God** [*anokhi adonai elohekha*]: [The words here] through to **those who keep my commandments** [at the end of v. 6] all constitute one verse according to the upper cantillation,[2] even though it includes two pronouncements.[3] You know that the upper cantillation was affixed according to the [individual] pronouncements, and it would have been proper to mark the word **slaves** [at the end of v. 2] as the end of a sentence.[4] However, these two pronouncements were conjoined due to their weighty status since God uttered them in the first person; [with regard to this] the Sages said, "*I* [*am the Eternal*

1. Hebrew Bibles offered a number of different versification schemes for the Decalogue in both Exodus and Deuteronomy; the versification in *Sefer Netivot ha-Shalom* adhered to the Berlin Pentateuch of 1705 and other early modern rabbinic Bibles. Our volume follows this versification throughout.

2. *ha-ṭaʿam ha-ʿelyon*. The Masoretic tradition preserved two sets of cantillation marks for Ex. 20:1–14, one that conformed to the usual division of verses while the other delineated the individual statements even if they extended to multiple verses. Mendelssohn began his comment here by focusing on this alternative set of *ṭeʿamim*.

3. *dibrot*; although often translated as "commandments," the discussion that follows turns on the clear distinction between *dibrot*, which Mendelssohn understood as "statements" or "pronouncements," and *miṣvot*, translated as "commandments."

4. *sof pasuq*; this would have indicated the end of the first pronouncement.

your God] and *You shall have no* [*other Gods*] (v. 3) were heard [directly] from the mouth of the Almighty."[5]

According to Maimonides, these two pronouncements contain one positive and four negative commandments, for he counted **I am the Eternal your God** as a commandment unto itself, this being [the obligation] "to believe that there is a cause that brings about everything in existence."[6] The author of the *Sefer ha-Ḥinnukh* added to Maimonides' statement ". . . and [to believe] all that was and all that will be for eternity; and that He brought us out of the land of Egypt and gave us the Torah."[7] This was taken from the formulation of the *Sefer Miṣvot Gadol*.[8] The author of the *Sefer Miṣvot Qaṭan*[9] and Ramban[10] added yet other fundamental principles which, in their opinion, are included in this verse.[11]

[However,] the author of *Halakhot Gedolot*[12] did not count the belief in a divine being as a positive commandment at all, for in his opinion the 613 commandments are all decrees of the Holy One, blessed be He, who decreed upon us to perform [certain deeds] or to refrain from doing them. However, the belief in His existence, may He be exalted, which is the principle and the root from which the commandments arise, is not counted as part of this enumeration.[13] This was likewise the opinion of R. Isaac Abarbanel in his commentary

5. Makk. 24a. The formulation of this last point was drawn from Abarbanel's commentary on 20:1. Mendelssohn returned to the question of the linguistic and substantive distinction of the first two pronouncements in his epilogue to this section, following v. 14.

6. *Sefer ha-Miṣvot*, positive commandment no. 1.

7. *Sefer ha-Ḥinnukh* is assumed to have been written in thirteenth-century Barcelona; the identity of its author remains unclear. This popular work listed and explained the 613 biblical commandments; the citation is from commandment no. 25.

8. *Sefer Miṣvot Gadol* was another compilation of the 613 commandments, penned by the thirteenth-century French Tosafist R. Moses b. Jacob of Coucy. The first positive commandment, based on Ex. 20:2, stated that one was enjoined "to believe that He who gave us the Torah at Sinai through Moses was the Lord God who took us out of Egypt." In referring to the similarity of language, Mendelssohn drew attention to the emphasis on God as Law-giver and Redeemer.

9. *Sefer Miṣvot Qaṭan* was penned by another French scholar of the thirteenth century, R. Isaac b. Joseph of Corbeil. In his explication of the first commandment, he stressed the imperative to believe in a providential and redeeming God.

10. See Ramban's commentary on Ex. 20:2, where he interpreted the verse as a series of necessarily linked principles: the exodus from Egypt attested to God's knowledge and providence, which necessitated belief in creation *ex nihilo* and divine omnipotence and unity.

11. These medieval scholars shared the view that the first pronouncement constituted a commandment to believe in some aspect of God's existence. A somewhat similar survey was offered by Abarbanel.

12. *Halakhot Gedolot* was an early medieval Geonic compilation or code of Talmudic law, dated to the eighth century and ascribed to the otherwise unknown R. Simeon Kayara; it was one of the earliest attempts to list and enumerate the rabbinic tradition of 613 biblical commandments.

13. The substance of this comment was found not in the *Halakhot Gedolot*—which provided only a straightforward enumeration of the biblical commandments—but in Ramban's gloss to the first positive commandment in Maimonides' *Sefer ha-Miṣvot* (see above, n. 6). Ramban had noted the failure of *Halakhot Gedolot* to include the belief in God's existence as a biblical commandment, and offered what he believed was the basis of this position: "It appears that the author

on the Torah, [who wrote that] "the pronouncement **I am the Eternal your God** is neither a commandment of belief nor of deed, but an introduction to the commandments and the proscriptions, stated with regard to the rest of the pronouncements. Its intent was to let them know who it was that was speaking with them—that it was not an interceding angel speaking to them at the behest of the Creator, as with all the other prophets, but rather He, the First Cause, without any intermediaries."[14]

Now, a straightforward reading of Scripture would appear to be in accordance with their position[15] that God directed the words **I am the Eternal your God** only toward those who [already] believed in His existence, and that the Holy One did not descend on Mount Sinai to teach His people of His existence, that He was a necessary existent, without limit and end, and other such true and established intelligible propositions.[16] For these [notions] are the outcome of examination and reflection upon the *Eternal's deeds and the work of His hands* (Ps. 28:5). *One who is graced* by God (Ex. 33:19) to recognize the magnificence of His work with regard to minerals and plants, animals and the human body in itself,[17] *to lift his eyes to the heavens and to consider who created these and brings forth their host by number* (Isa. 40:26)—he is graced. And one who has not reached this level [of understanding] will have to receive those intelligible propositions from an individual who apprehends [them], one who can be relied upon to impart the truth *as it is in his mind* (Josh. 14:7). But for one who is thwarted [in his effort to grasp] those intelligible propositions and wearies of attaining them, the [propositions] will neither be verified nor established in his mind by an utterance of God stating "I exist" or by *thunder and lightning and a dense cloud and a blast of the horn* (Ex. 19:16). Such [occurrences] only provide evidence or proof of those theoretical intelligible propositions to one who [already] believes in the existence of God, for even someone receiving [those propositions] from an individual who

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of the *Halakhot Gedolot* thought that the 613 commandments are all decrees of the Holy One, blessed be He, who decreed upon us to perform or to refrain from doing. However, the belief in His existence, may He be exalted, which He indicated to us by means of signs and portents and in the revelation of the divine Presence before our eyes—that belief which is the principle and the root from which the commandments arise is not counted in the list [of the commandments]." This analysis of the Geonic source was cited in slightly reformulated form in Abarbanel's commentary on Ex. 20:2, and it was this presentation that Mendelssohn utilized here. There was, however, one significant and crucial difference between the medieval formulation and Mendelssohn's presentation of *Halakhot Gedolot*: the omission of the notion that God's existence was known through divine signs and the revelation at Sinai. Mendelssohn's formulation offered an alternative to Ramban's understanding of the *Halakhot Gedolot*, one that was commensurate with his own position in the commentary that follows.

14. Abarbanel to Ex. 20:2 (response to the seventh question).

15. I.e., *Halakhot Gedolot* and Abarbanel, that Ex. 20:2 not be read as a commandment.

16. *muskalot*; see above, *Be'ur Millot ha-Higgayon*, ch. 8.

17. The phrase " . . . with regard to minerals and plants, animals and the human body itself . . . " was taken from Ibn Ezra's commentary.

imparts them by an utterance or statement must first believe that he is a *trustworthy soul* (Prov. 11:13) who does not deceive; and if the one who imparts them is God Himself in His glory, the listener must [first] believe that he is *truly God* (Jer. 10:10).[18]

It would appear that this is truly how it was: that [the children of] Israel—descendants of a long line of believers[19]—knew and believed in the existence of God and His unity, some of them by means of intellectual discernment, and some as a received tradition from trustworthy ancestors or from the leaders and sages of the generation. This statement [in v. 2] only intended to single them out as *a special possession among all the nations* so that they become a *holy people* to God (Ex. 19:5–6) from among all the nations of the earth, as I will explain. This is because with regard to all the speculative intelligible propositions that we mentioned, the children of Israel are neither different from nor have an advantage over the other peoples; all acknowledge His divinity, may He be blessed, and even those who worship other gods acknowledge the great power and the unqualified might of the God most High, and likewise our Sages said, "They call Him the God of Gods."[20] Likewise, Scripture states *From where the sun rises to where it sets, my Name is honored among the peoples, and everywhere incense and pure oblation are offered to my Name* °(Mal. 1:11). And it would appear that this is what the Psalmist was also referring to when he said *The heavens declare the glory of God*, etc. °(Ps. 19:2), *No teaching, no words, without a voice being heard* °(Ps. 19:4). The intended meaning is that that notion [of God's existence] would become known in the world without utterance and speech, for every utterance and speech is known only to one who understands that [particular] language, while the declarations of heaven and the works of God's hands can be understood by all the world's inhabitants. With these, there is neither speaker nor words that won't be heard and understood by everyone, for *their chord is sounded over the entire earth, their instruction reaches as far as the habited world* (Ps. 19:5).[21]

18. The phrase from Jeremiah can also be translated adjectivally, as *God is true*, in the sense that God is faithful and trustworthy. Mendelssohn articulated this argument in the same terms in *Jerusalem*. After stating that Judaism contained no exclusive revelation of eternal truths, and that no "universal religion of mankind" was revealed at Sinai, he wrote: "In reality, it could not have been revealed there, for who was to be convinced of these eternal doctrines of salvation by the voice of thunder and the sounds of trumpets? Surely not the unthinking, brute-like man, whose own reflections had not yet led him to the existence of an invisible being that governs the visible. The miraculous voice would not have instilled any concepts in him and, therefore, would not have convinced him" (*JubA*, 8:164).

19. Lit.: believers [who are] the sons of believers, a popular saying that originated in rabbinic literature.

20. Men. 110a. The latter part of this sentence, from "[they] acknowledge the great power" and the rabbinic citation, was drawn from Ramban's commentary on v. 3. The phrase "God most High" (*el ʿelyon*) was apt here, since it alluded to Gen. 14:18–20 and a pre-Israelite acknowledgment of divine power and authority.

21. The argument and prooftexts offered here were repeated in *Jerusalem*; see *JubA*, 8:191–92.

[Only] afterward did [the Psalmist] point out the superiority of the Torah,[22] which is *a heritage of the congregation of Jacob* (Deut. 33:4) [and] exclusive to a special people; through [the Torah] they are distinguished from the other nations of the earth, *to set them high above all the nations* (Deut. 26:19).

Although the peoples of the world acknowledge the existence of God and His power over everything, they nevertheless also worship a being other than Him. Some worship ministering angels, thinking that God gave each of them a nation or state or province to rule and that [ministering angels] have the power to bring harm or benefit [to them] at will. They are referred to in the Torah and in all of Scripture as *other gods*, as Ramban explained in [his commentary on] this section, and likewise they were referred to as the *gods of the peoples* (e.g., Deut. 6:14), for angels were referred to as gods [*elohim*]. Others worship the celestial stars or demons or humans; they construct images and idols and bow down to them, as is known.[23]

Now, rational judgment would not compel one to prohibit worship of this kind to a descendant of Noah,[24] as long as he does not think to remove himself from the domain of the God most high,[25] for what would obligate him to direct all worship and prayer *to the Eternal alone* (Ex. 22:19)? If a person should hope for good and fear evil from a being other than Him, and acknowledges that such a being is also subservient to the hand of the God most high, it would not defy reason were he to sacrifice, offer incense and libations, and pray[26] to that being, be it an angel or spirit or a person, a *mighty warrior, officer*, and ruler (2 Chron. 32:21).[27] Who would tell us that all these forms of worship are properly directed *to the Eternal alone* were it not that the Holy One, Blessed be He, warned us against it in His Torah? And indeed, the Sages stated that the descendants of

22. Mendelssohn was referring ahead to Ps. 19:8, *God's teaching* [*torah*] *is complete*, etc.

23. Much of this paragraph was drawn from Ramban's commentary on v. 3; Ramban delineated three categories or forms of idolatry, and it was only in the context of the first category—the worship of celestial guardian angels—that he explicitly linked such idolatry with the acknowledgment of a supreme God. Mendelssohn, however, suggested that all peoples, regardless of their modes of worship, still acknowledge God as a supreme being; he notably avoided the use of the word idolatry in this context, since he will take the position (in what follows) that for gentiles, the worship of other gods in tandem with the God of the Bible does not constitute idolatry and is therefore not prohibited.

24. *ben noaḥ*, or Noahide, referred to the peoples of the world, a designation informed by the rabbinic notion of *miṣvot bene noaḥ*, the seven injunctions that applied to all humans. The first of these injunctions was the prohibition against idolatry, and Mendelssohn's discussion sought to articulate the precise bounds of that prohibition.

25. On Mendelssohn's choice of this appellation, see above, n. 20.

26. This use of the phrase "to sacrifice, offer incense and libations" is highly suggestive here, since it was drawn from midrashic sources with reference to two non-Israelites, Pharaoh and Yitro, and their idolatrous practices; see Mekh. *Be-Shallaḥ,* section 2, and Yal. Sh. § 232; and Mekh. *Yitro*, section 1. See also M. San. 7:6.

27. Cf. Ramban's comment on Deut. 32:12.

Noah were not warned against *shittuf*,[28] since with regard to [Noahides] these deeds are not considered to be a rebellion against divine honor—as long as it is not their intention to remove themselves from the domain of the *God of gods and the Lord of lords* (Deut. 10:17).

However, we [are] *the people close to him* (Ps. 148:14), since He *brought us out of Egypt, the house of bondage* (Ex. 13:14), and did all these wonders for us in order *to be His very own treasured people from among all the peoples* (Deut. 4:20, 7:6); [and on account of] His ruling over us in His glory directly, without the means of an angel or [celestial] minister or star, we, his servants, are obligated to accept upon ourselves the yoke of His kingship and rule, and to fulfill His decrees. He decreed upon us not to worship anything other than Him; and He specified the forms of worship that are appropriate to Him alone, [but] not to any being other than Him, and it is thus not appropriate to conjoin another god to Him with any of these modes of worship. Thus Scripture said:[29] *Or when you look up to the sky and see the sun, the moon, the stars, the whole host of the heavens, and you are misled to venerate them and worship them; since, indeed, the Eternal your God has surely permitted them for all the other peoples under the sky. But the Eternal took you from the iron furnace, that is, he led you out of Miṣrayim, that you might become His treasured people, as you now truly are* °(Deut. 4:19–20).[30]

As such, our verse may be restated as follows: **I** °(the speaker and commander) **am the Eternal** °(who was, is, and will be, the source of all existent things, who is provident and present at the time of their troubles to those who love me) **your God** °(mighty and powerful, from whom all good is hoped and all bad is feared,

28. The word *shittuf* (lit.: partnership or association) appeared in medieval sources with reference to the notion that Noahides were not prohibited from believing in deities other than God as long as those deities were associated with—and secondary to—the true God of Israel. Mendelssohn was thus arguing that as long as gentiles recognized the ultimate supremacy of God, the worship of an associated star or celestial being or even a human did not constitute idolatry and was therefore permissible. The source of this position, however, was not in the writings of the Sages, as Mendelssohn suggested, but Tosafot to San. 63b, later codified in the gloss of R. Moses Isserles to *Shulḥan ʿArukh*, *Oraḥ Ḥayyim* § 156(1).

29. The verses preceding this citation reiterated the warnings against worshipping idols or sculpted images of any sort. Verses 19–20 served as a deuteronomistic addendum that articulated Israel's unique obligation to uphold a "pure" monotheism, thus proscribing the worship of heavenly bodies even though they were divinely created.

30. In the *Beʾur* to Deut. 4:19, Mendelssohn cited Rashbam and inserted two parenthetical comments that reinforced his point here: "*Since, indeed, the Eternal your God has surely permitted them for all the other peoples*: . . . According to the true *peshaṭ*, the words mean that indeed, God allowed them [= heavenly bodies] to all the nations to worship because He is not concerned about them [engaging in such worship] °(as long as they recognize and acknowledge that God is the cause of all causes, the supreme Provident; for *shittuf* was not prohibited to the descendants of Noah). *But the Eternal took you . . . and led you out . . . that you might become His treasured people* and to worship Him, and *that He will be for you a God* (Deut. 29:12) °(without any intermediary or *shittuf*)."

and to whom it is fitting to direct all prayer and worship), **who led you out of the land of Miṣrayim, out of the house of slaves** °(*that you might become His treasured people* [Deut. 4:20], as we have said, and it is proper for you to dedicate all worship to the Unique Name). You will understand from this why He did not say "I am the Eternal your God who created the heaven and the earth and who created you." This was the question that the scholar Judah ha-Levi, may his resting place be an honor, asked Ibn Ezra and [which] is also raised in his *Kuzari*, but his answer is inadequate.[31] Whether a belief in creation and production [of the world] in time could be sustained by decisive rational demonstration, as some scholars think, or whether reason cannot determine between this view and the belief in the eternity of the world, as per Maimonides in the *Guide*[32]—this belief, in any event, is not unique to God's treasured people alone, and is not a reason for the acceptance of the exclusive yoke of His sovereignty and a rejection of *shittuf*. But being taken from the house of slaves, from slavery to freedom, is the correct reason for this.[33] It likewise applies to the observance of the other commandments in the Torah such as that of the Sabbath; and although [this precept] serves as a sign for the creation of the world, *for in six days the Eternal made heaven*, etc. (Ex. 20:11), the descendants of Noah are not commanded to desist from all work on this day, and this is what is indicated in the second Decalogue, *for you were a slave*, etc., . . . *therefore the Eternal your God has commanded you to observe the sabbath day* °(Deut. 5:15), as we will mention there in [the commentary], with the help of heaven. God, may He be exalted, gave the Torah and the commandments, the statutes and laws, to us alone; *He is our king, our lawgiver* (Isa. 33:22), and it is incumbent upon us to observe His statutes and precepts, whether as children or slaves;[34] and likewise, in the Mekhilta, the Sages said with regard to the verse **who led you out [of the land of Miṣrayim]**—"the exodus would be reason enough for you to be subjugated to me."[35]

out of the house of slaves [*mi-bet ʿavadim*]: [do you interpret these words to mean that they were removed] from the house of Pharoah to whom you were enslaved, or do you take the words **out of the house of slaves** to mean that they were the slaves of slaves? When Scripture says [*He*] *rescued you from the house of slaves, from the hand of Pharoah king of Miṣrayim* °(Deut. 7:8), we may answer

31. See Ibn Ezra's commentary on Ex. 20:2, in which he recounted the question and offered his response; and *Kuzari* I:12–25. Mendelssohn's gibe that "his answer is inadequate" referred to Ibn Ezra.

32. See, e.g., II:16 and 25.

33. I.e., for the acknowledgment of God's exclusive sovereignty over Israel.

34. This phrase was taken from the New Year liturgy.

35. The version of the Mekhilta from which this was cited had not yet been printed; Mendelssohn's immediate source was Rashi.

that they were slaves of the king, and not slaves of slaves °(these are Rashi's words, taken from the Mekhilta).[36]

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3 You shall have no other gods before Me.[37]

Commentary

3. **You shall have no**, etc. [*lo yihyeh lekha* (*elohim*)]: this is akin to the formulation *and the Eternal shall be for me a protective God* [*ve-hayah . . . li le-ʾelohim*] °(Gen. 28:21)[38] [and] *to be revered by you as your God* [*lihyot lakhem le-ʾelohim*] °(Lev. 11:45); that is, other than the Eternal, we are not to have other gods from all the celestial angels or from all the heavenly host who are referred to as *elohim*, as it is written, *one who slaughters a sacrifice to other divine beings, other than to the Eternal alone, has forfeited his life* °(Ex. 22:19). It is a proscription not to believe in any one of these beings and not to take [any of them] upon himself as a deity nor say to it "you are my god."[39] This is also the opinion of Onqelos, who translated this as "[you shall not have] another god other than Me." This is what Ramban wrote, and he added further: "Know that wherever Scripture says **other gods** [*elohim aḥerim*] the meaning is 'gods other than the Exalted Name.' [Scripture] employs this expression with respect to accepting [a certain] divinity or worshipping it, thus saying 'Do not accept upon yourselves any god *other than the Eternal alone*.' But when Scripture speaks of the making [of idols], it does not, heaven forbid, use the word 'other,' but says *do not make for yourselves gods of metal* °(Lev. 19:4) [or] *do not make for yourself any gods of molten metal* °(Ex. 34:17), and they are referred to in this way because they were made with the intent of being his gods. But with reference to them Scripture says, *for they were no gods, but the works of men's hands, wood and stone* °(Isa. 37:19)." These are [Ramban's] words.

before Me [*ʿal panai*]: as long as I exist, so that you should not say that only that generation was commanded with regard to idolatry °(Mekh.).[40] Ramban explained that "'*al panai* should be understood in the same sense as *he will surely curse You to Your face* [*ʿal panekha*] °(Job 1:11), *I will not lie to your face* [*ʿal penekhem*] °(Job 6:28); [God] is thus warning: do not make **other gods**, for they will be **before Me** and I look and see at all times and in all places at those who

36. Mekh. *Yitro*, section 5.

37. Mendelssohn translated *ʿal panai* as *vor meinem Angesicht*, which could also be rendered as "in my Presence." Mendelssohn largely translated the various forms of *panim* ("face") as *Angesicht* (or occasionally *Antlitz*), without distinguishing between human faces or the divine Countenance.

38. Mendelssohn's translation read: *Und der Ewige mir als Schutzgott bei stehen* [sic] *wird*.

39. Drawing upon M. San. 7:6, which alluded to Isa. 44:17.

40. This comment was drawn from Rashi's paraphrase of Mekh. *Yitro*, section 6.

[would] make them. For something done in front of someone while he is present is referred to as 'before his face [*ʿal panav*].' Likewise *so the gift went before him* [*ʿal panav*] °(Gen. 32:22), [and] *Eleazar and Itamar then conducted the priesthood, before* [*ʿal pene*] *their father Aaron* °(Num. 3:4) since their father Aaron was standing there and watching." These are [Ramban's] words. Onqelos translated this as "besides Me."

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4 You shall not make for yourself an idolatrous image, or any similar figure, of that which is in the sky above, or on the earth below, or in the water under the earth.

Commentary

4. **idolatrous image** [*pesel*]: [it is called a *pesel*] because it is sculpted [*nifsal*].[41]

or any similar figure [*ve-khol temunah*]: even if it is not sculpted. This is the language of the Mekhilta: "you shall not make for yourself an idolatrous image: does this mean that you may not make an engraved image for yourself but that one may make something solid? Scripture thus said, **or any similar figure**."[42]

of that which is in the sky above [*asher ba-shamayim mi-maʿal*]: the intended meaning is "a figure *of* something in the sky above,"[43] for there is no figure in the sky.[44] In the opinion of Maimonides, this is a proscription concerning the making [of idols], i.e., that he may not make gods of molten metal—neither for himself nor for others.[45] Ramban wrote[46] that the intended meaning was that "**you shall not make for yourself an idolatrous image, or any similar figure** to bow down or to worship them in any manner of worship whatsoever. That is why the [following]

41. Or: graven. Rashi.

42. Mekh. *Yitro*, section 6. The midrash did not explain the distinction between engraved (*gelufah*) and solid (*aṭumah*), but it appeared to be the difference between something formed with cavities and orifices providing definition, and an unshaped mass. The exegetical issue was the meaning of *figure* (which Mendelssohn rendered *ähnliche Gestalt*) in relation to a sculpted *idolatrous image*; the *Beʾur* addressed this by extending Rashi's comment and conflating it with Mekhilta, suggesting that the verse prohibited an unsculpted object no less than something fashioned.

43. Rashi, following the version included in the Berlin 1705 Pentateuch.

44. The explanatory clause was taken from Mizrahi. The point of this comment was to suggest that the verse be read as if the word *figure* was in the construct form (i.e., *temunat*), which is to say a figurative representation *of* something. Mizrahi specifically noted that the prohibition included any figurative representation of astral configurations, e.g., the constellations.

45. *Mishneh Torah*, ʿAvodah Zarah 3:9; and see *Sefer ha-Miṣvot*, negative commandment 2: "there is no difference between making [an idol] himself and directing them to be made [by others]."

46. The citation of Ramban extended to the end of the paragraph and was excerpted with slight editing.

verse has *you shall not bow down to them*,[47] for it is connected to the [prohibition against] making, with the verse prohibiting them from bowing down to the [images or figures that he made]. All these verses are proscriptions against various forms of idol worship, and all of them are liable for capital punishment. This particular verse does not include a proscription against making figures not [intended] for worship; rather, Scripture admonishes against this further on, *do not make for yourself any gods of molten metal* °(Ex. 34:17), *you shall not make for yourself silver and gold idols* °(Ex. 20:20), *do not make idols for yourselves* °(Lev. 26:1)."[48]

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5 You shall not bow down before them nor venerate them in worship; for I the Eternal your God am a jealous God °(who cannot suffer another by his side), who requites the crime[49] of the fathers upon children, grandchildren, and great-grandchildren, namely those who hate Me.

Commentary

5. **jealous** [*qanna*]: granting honor and love to one who is unworthy of them, or withholding them from one who is worthy, will arouse in our hearts a sense of jealousy, and one whose soul is prone to be affected by exposure to this is called **jealous**; this [language] applies whether it is with regard to his own honor, as in *if one is seized by a spirit of jealousy, that he is jealous of his wife* °(Num. 5:14), or with regard to the honor of others, *are you jealous for me?* °(Num. 11:29). Now,[50] concerning God, the language of jealousy is used only with regard to idolatry,[51] and thus it is in the Mekhilta: "With jealousy do I exact punishment for idolatry, but I am all-merciful and all-gracious with regard to other matters."[52] Moreover, even regarding idolatry, one will not find the language of jealousy used except with reference to Israel alone,[53] as we have mentioned; for they alone, when they worship idolatry, withhold the honor and the worship from Him who is alone wor-

47. Verse 5 does not have a conjunctive *vav* at the beginning of the verse (*And you shall not . . .*). Ramban took this absence of a disjunction to indicate that the two verses had to be read as one prohibition.

48. With regard to making figures for decorative and non-idolatrous purposes, see Maimonides, *Mishneh Torah*, ʿAvodah Zarah 3:10, citing Ex. 20:20.

49. *Verbrechen*, for the Hebrew *ʿavon*. Mendelssohn translated *ʿavon* in various ways: in contexts related to the sacrificial cult, he rendered the word as *Verschuldigung* (e.g., Ex. 28:43, Lev. 22:16), and in contexts having to do with insurrection (and in one case, infidelity), as *Missetat* (e.g., Ex. 34:7, Num. 5:15, 14:18).

50. Beginning with this sentence, and extending down to the words "Israel alone," the commentary was drawn from Ramban, with some condensing and editing.

51. See Maimonides, *Guide* I:36.

52. Mekh. *Yitro*, section 6.

53. See n. 50.

thy [of their worship] and extend it to that which is unworthy. Rashi's comment to this reads: "A jealous God—He is zealous to mete out punishment, and does not forgo his attribute [of justice] to forgive idol worship. The language of *qanna—enprenment*[54] in French—always connotes 'careful to exact punishment.'"

requites [*poqed*]: every instance in which [the word] *peqidah* is used with the preposition *ʿal*[55] it specifically connotes "exacting payment" and "punishment."[56] The intended meaning here is that God exacts payment for the crime of the father from the children and destroys them on account of their father's offense, as Scripture states *prepare a slaughtering block for his sons, on account of the crime of their fathers* °(Isa. 14:21). And He will sometimes exact punishment on the **grandchildren**, who constitute the third generation, on account of the [father's] misdeed, and sometimes on the fourth generation, when their crimes will not be fully realized until that generation, as it is said *for up to that time the iniquity of the Emori was not yet full* °(Gen. 15:16); but in the fifth generation, the son will not be punished on account of the crime of the [first-generation] father °(from the words of Ramban).

those who hate Me [*le-soneʾai*]: Onqelos translated "and upon the fourth generation of those who hate me," and then added "when the children continue to sin in the way of their fathers" in order to explain the word *le-soneʾai*, whose intended meaning is "if the children [persist in] hating me."[57] However, if he gave birth to a righteous son, he will not bear the crime of his father, as Ezekiel explained °(Ez. 18:17ff).[58]

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6 But bestows mercy up to the thousandth generation; to those who love Me and keep My commandments.

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54. Or: *enprenemant*. The transliteration from the French follows M. Catane, *Oṣar ha-Leʿazim* (Jerusalem, 1990), 7.

55. The biblical phrase here reads: ***poqed*** ʿavon avot ʿ***al*** banim ʿ***al*** . . . .

56. Although Mendelssohn indicated at the end of this entry that the comment had been excerpted from Ramban, this last phrase, " . . . specifically connotes 'exacting payment' and 'punishment'" was his own gloss. Ramban had stated that the words *poqed ʿal* meant vengeance, and a little later on, vengeance and punishment, but Mendelssohn substituted vengeance with the word "payment."

57. The last phrase and the crux of this interpretation was taken from Rashbam; Mendelssohn added the reference to Onqelos in order to further elucidate this reading.

58. The last sentence was Ramban. The *Beʾur* here gave voice to the rabbinic discomfort with the notion of collective responsibility and its consequences. Whereas the verse offered an unqualified notion of cross-generational accountability, the Sages either suggested that later generations were punished only when they perpetuated the fathers' misdeeds (see Ber. 7a), or drew upon prophetic passages (e.g., the verse in Ezekiel) to suggest that the statement in Exodus had been "annulled" in favor of personal accountability (see Makk. 24a).

Commentary

6. **thousandth generation** [*la-ʾalafim*]:[59] [this should be read as] the children of the thousandth [generation]; just as the [previous] verse had third [*shilleshim*], fourth [*ribbeʿim*],[60] so too *alafim* which is the thousandth generation; for a reference to children is one generation, and to the sons of [these] children a second generation, and the children of the last generation, to the thousandth, are referred to as children of *alafim*. This was the explanation of Rashbam, and so it is in the German translation.

to those who love Me [*le-ʾohavai*]: those who are willing to give their lives for Him; who acknowledge the Exalted Name and His divinity exclusively, and who deny all foreign gods and do not worship them [even] when it endangers their lives. And **[those who] keep my commandments**—those are the other righteous individuals.[61]

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7 You shall not speak the name of the Eternal your God in vain; for the Eternal will not hold blameless one who will speak His name in vain.

Commentary

7. **you shall not speak** [*lo tissa*]: Onqelos translated this as "you shall not swear," [taking the word] to connote an oath. The Sages likewise said that this is a warning to one who would swear by the Exalted Name for no purpose.[62] Ramban wrote that "according to the *peshaṭ*, this verse also prohibits one from uttering the Exalted Name gratuitously, as with the [biblical] expression *do not take up* [*lo tissa*] *false reports* °(Ex. 23:1), or *may I not take* [*u-val essa*] *their names upon my lips* °(Ps. 16:4). Speech is referred to this way because [when speaking,] the voice is taken up, as in *A pronouncement* [*massa*], *the word of the Eternal* °(Zech. 9:1, 12:1, and Mal. 1:1)." So it is in the German translation.

in vain [*la-shav*]: The [text of] Rashi that we have reads:[63] "°(the first [mention of the word *la-shav* in our verse] connotes a falsehood, as indicated by its Aramaic

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59. Taken in its plain sense and without context, the word *alafim* simply means thousands. The comment here sought to explain that as in v. 5, the words refer to the generations that follow.

60. Mendelssohn translated these as grandchildren and great-grandchildren, based on his explanation here of the verse as referring to *the children of* the third generation, etc.

61. Ramban. Given that he defined the love of God as the willingness to sacrifice one's life, Ramban delineated this other group as individuals who adhered faithfully to the Torah, even if they were not among those ready to sacrifice themselves for the preservation of God's Name.

62. See, e.g., Shab. 120a, Shev. 20b.

63. In this citation of Rashi, Mendelssohn reproduced the text precisely as he had it in the Berlin 1705 Bible, including the parentheses.

translation, as it is said [in the Mishnah]) 'What is a vain oath? If he swore, declaring something to be different than that which is well known, saying that a pillar of stone was made of gold';[64] °(the second [mention of the word *la-shav* in our verse] connotes something done in vain, as indicated by its Aramaic translation, [namely] one who swears gratuitously and for no reason) that a tree is a tree, a rock is a rock." These are the words of Rashi. In the [Aramaic translation of] Onqelos that we have, the matter is reversed, for he has translated the first *la-shav* as "in vain," and the second "falsely."[65] [However,] in the two manuscripts of Rashi's commentary in my possession, the text [of the commentary] is as follows: "*la-shav*—something gratuitous, for no reason; and what is a vain oath? If he swore, declaring something to be different than that which is well known, saying that a pillar of stone was made of gold."[66] This was also the version cited by Mizrahi in his book, who wrote that Rashi only referred to one who swore that something was different than that which is well known, but [Mizrahi added that] this is also the case when one swears to affirm something that is well known, as for example that a tree is a tree, a rock is a rock. For this reason the German translation rendered both to mean gratuitous, for no reason °(*vergeblich*).

for [the Eternal] will not hold blameless [*ki lo yenaqqeh*]: Just as Scripture dealt severely with idolatry and indicated that He was *a jealous God who requites the crime of the fathers on children* (above, v. 5), so too with regard to this punishment, **[the Eternal] will not hold** [him] **blameless**. Just as it is proper *to fear the Exalted and Frightful Name* (Deut. 28:58) by not giving the glory due Him to another [deity], so too it is proper to honor His Name, and one who speaks His Name in vain profanes it, as it is written, *You shall not swear falsely in my Name, thereby profaning the Name of your God* °(Lev. 19:12). [In this instance,] however, it was sufficient to say **for [the Eternal] will not hold blameless**, and [Scripture] did not say *a jealous God* and *requites the crime*, because the one who swears does not regard it as a real sin, and he will think that he deserves to be forgiven; thus it is written **for [the Eternal] will not hold [him] blameless** to forgive him °(these are from the words of Ramban).[67] And Ibn Ezra's words about this verse, that it addressed itself to those who habitually swore for no reason, even

64. M. Shev. 3:8.

65. This is also the text of Onqelos as it appeared in the Berlin 1705 Pentateuch. Mendelssohn's point was that despite the textual confusion he was about to introduce, Onqelos and Rashi were of one mind that the two occurrences of the word *la-shav* were to be understood differently.

66. Those versions of Rashi did not distinguish between the two occurrences of the word *la-shav* in our verse; both were to be understood as "in vain."

67. Although Mendelssohn presented Ramban's comment and replicated his words and articulations, he rearranged the sentences and added a few words in order to present a clearer and more focused understanding of the verse.

when no oath was demanded of them—*the knowledgeable know they are straight* (Prov. 8:9), and it is proper that every Jew take this to heart.[68]

"Now,[69] the language of this verse, [**You shall not speak**] **the name of the Eternal your God** is written as if Moses was speaking,[70] and this is the case for all the pronouncements after this one; but in the first two verses,[71] God was speaking [in the first person]—*I* [*am the Eternal*] . . . . *who led you out . . . before my face . . . for I the Eternal your God . . . to those who love Me and keep My commandments* (vv. 2–6). For this reason, the Sages said '*I* [*am the Eternal your God*] and *You shall have no* [*other gods*] (vv. 2–3) were heard directly from the Almighty,'[72] since they are the entire foundation [of the Torah]."[73] Ramban explained the intention of the Sages: "All of Israel certainly heard all ten pronouncements from God, in accordance with the *peshaṭ* of the verse *Then the Eternal spoke all these words, as follows* (v. 1) and even more explicitly *The Eternal spoke these words to your congregation* °(Deut. 5:19).[74] However, with the first two pronouncements [Israel] heard the spoken word and understood it from Him just as Moses understood them, and thus He spoke with the people as a master speaks to his servant. [But] from this point onward, with the remaining pronouncements, they would hear the sound of the spoken word but would not comprehend it and Moses needed to translate each and every pronouncement until they understood it from him. This is also how the [Sages] interpret the verse *Moses addressed Him, and God answered him in a loud voice* °(Ex. 19:19).[75] As such, [the last eight pronouncements] constituted words spoken by God to Moses that Moses would [then] say to Is-

68. Ramban had also pointed in passing to Ibn Ezra's commentary, but he merely indicated that his words were appropriate. Mendelssohn filled in this reference by briefly encapsulating Ibn Ezra's words.

69. At this juncture, Mendelssohn began citing from Ramban; acknowledgment of the citation came at the end of the comment on this verse.

70. That is, referring to God in the third person.

71. I.e., the first two pronouncements, as per Mendelssohn's discussion of Ex. 20:2.

72. Makk. 24a.

73. At this point Mendelssohn omitted a few lines from Ramban; see the following note.

74. In Ramban's commentary these two prooftexts did not appear here but a few lines earlier, and Mendelssohn's editing was most telling. In the lines he had omitted just above (see the previous note), Ramban referred to Ibn Ezra's dismissal of the significance of the shift from the first to the third person; the latter stated that God had uttered all the pronouncements and thereby denied this categorical distinction in the Decalogue. Mendelssohn embraced Ramban's explication of the rabbinic view, but by inserting the two prooftexts utilized by Ibn Ezra, he sought to underscore the fact that Ramban—no less than he—was fully cognizant of the *peshaṭ*.

75. Ramban's precise rabbinic reference was not entirely clear; he may have been referring to Mekh. *Yitro*, section 4, which explicated Ex. 19:19; or, in light of a passing comment in *Guide* II:33, to a statement commenting on Ex. 20:1 in that same section of Mekhilta. See also Tan. Exodus [§ 25].

rael. The intention in this[76] was that they would all be prophets with regard to the belief in God and the prohibition of idolatry—since they are the foundation of all the commandments[77] as it is said *Gather the people to me, that I may let them hear my words, so they learn to fear Me all the days* °(Deut. 4:10). But with regard to the remaining pronouncements, they heard *audible words* (Deut. 4:12) while receiving their explanation from Moses. And with the other commandments,[78] they relied entirely on Moses." These are Ramban's words.

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8 Always remember the day of rest to keep it holy.

Commentary

8. **always remember** [*zakhor*]: [this word is an] infinitive rather than an imperative.[79] Now, the verbal root *zayin–khaf–resh* in its simple [*qal*] conjugation indicates the converse of forgetting, that is, the vestige of a thing's form and its impression on the mind after the perceptible item is removed from us.[80] In the causative form the verb connotes the [act of] relating or recounting something orally,[81] since by recounting something orally the impressions are produced in the mind and the things will be remembered, even if they are not available to the senses. Examples of this are: *remember me* [*hizkartani*] *in front of Pharaoh* °(Gen. 40:14), *to remember* [*le-hazkir*] *my name* °(2 Sam. 18:18), [*He appointed Levites . . .*] *to remember* [*le-hazkir*], *to praise, and to extol* °(1 Chron. 16:4). The Sages said that even the simple conjugation indicates oral remembrance as they taught: *remember* [*zakhor*] orally, *be careful to observe* [*shamor*] in the heart,[82] and their interpretation will be explained below in [our *Be'ur* to] Deuteronomy °(5:12). However, the straightforward sense of Scripture is in accordance with the commentary

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76. I.e., that God wanted them to hear the first two pronouncements without Moses as an intermediary.

77. Ramban had written "since they are the foundation for the entire Torah and the commandments"; Mendelssohn omitted the word Torah in his otherwise verbatim citation of this passage in consideration of the universality of the first two pronouncements as per his introduction to this chapter.

78. I.e., other than the pronouncements.

79. Ibn Melekh; the imperative would have been vocalized *zekhor*. In his translation, however, Mendelssohn maintained the familiar imperative.

80. Mendelssohn casually and rather generally utilized a theory of memory that originated in ancient Greek thought and was reiterated by early modern thinkers such as John Locke and David Hume.

81. That is, saying the words rather than merely thinking them.

82. The reference to *shamor* is to the repetition of the Decalogue in Deut. 5:12, which Mendelssohn translated as *Nimm den Ruhetag wohl in Acht*. The rabbinic source was Sifra, *Be-Ḥuqqotai*, introductory section, paragraph 3.

of Rashbam: "[The biblical sense of] remembering always refers to times past °(it appears that he is referring to its simple conjugation, as I explained above), [as for example] *Remember the ancient times*, etc., *when the Most High settled the nations* °(Deut. 32:7–8); [and] *remember this day* (Ex. 13:3)—[remember] forever that in the past, you went forth from Egypt on this day. [Similarly,] *Remind yourself and never forget how you angered the Eternal your God in the desert* °(Deut. 9:7) [and] *Think of Your Grace, o Lord! Of your goodness, which have been forever!* °(Ps. 25:6). So too here, **always remember the day of rest** [that followed] the six days of creation, as the text goes on to explain (in v. 11) *for in six days the Eternal made*, etc. Therefore, our verse says **always remember . . . to keep it holy**." These are the Rashbam's words.

The meaning of **to keep it holy** is to set that day apart from the other days with a qualitative superiority by refraining from work,[83] and to turn from all temporal thoughts and to devote it to having our souls delight in the ways of God. For this is the meaning of holiness, as the notion [expressed] in *call the Sabbath a delight, this holy day of the Eternal most exalted* °(Isa. 58:13). It was a Jewish custom to visit the prophets just before Sabbath to hear the word of God, as in the verse *why are you going to him today?—it is neither the new moon nor the Sabbath?* °(2 Kgs. 4:23), with regard to which the Sages explained that on the new moon and Sabbath, one would have gone.[84]

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9 Six days you may labor, and carry out all your work.

10 But the seventh day is a day of rest to venerate the Eternal your God; you shall carry out no handicraft, neither yourself nor your son or your daughter, your slave, your female slave, not even by means of your livestock or by means of your stranger who is in your gates.

11 For in six days the Eternal made the heaven, earth, and the sea and all that is therein, and on the seventh day [He] rested; therefore the Eternal blessed the day of rest °(He gave it superior qualities[85]) and declared it holy.

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83. The first sentence of this paragraph expanded upon Rashbam's brief comment that came at the end of the full citation above; at this juncture, Mendelssohn proceeded to merge the point into the comment of Ramban; see the next note.

84. Most of this paragraph was drawn from Ramban in edited form; the rabbinic reference was to R.H. 16b.

85. *er hat ihm wichtige Vorzüge gegeben*.

Commentary

9. **six days you may labor** [*sheshet yamim taʿavod*]: [this connotes] permission,[86] and so it is in the German translation.

and carry out all your work [*ve-ʿasita kol melaʾkhtekha*]: anything you wish to do. The Sages explained that when the Sabbath arrives you should regard all your work as if it were completed, so as not to concern yourself with it.[87]

10. **yourself** [*attah*]: this includes everyone who is obligated to observe the commandments.[88]

your son or your daughter [*u-vinkha u-vittekha*]: these are the minors for whom you are responsible; they are not to perform work with your knowledge or at your behest. And likewise **your slave** [and] **your female slave**—those who are within our authority: we must watch over them and prevent them from doing any work, even for others.[89]

your livestock [*u-vhemtekha*]: do not allow it to work on the Sabbath.

your stranger who is in your gates [*ve-gerekha asher bi-sheʿarekha*]: according to the *peshaṭ*, this verse is speaking about the resident foreigner, referred to as the "foreigner of the gate." [Such a foreigner] is one who accepts upon himself the obligation to uphold the seven Noahide laws but is not commanded to observe the Sabbath laws; but we are commanded not to have him work on that day to serve our needs. This is what Ramban wrote,[90] and so it is in the German translation. The Sages, however, said that this verse refers to a convert:[91] [they note that a different verse,] *that the son of your female slave and the stranger may recover* °(Ex. 23:12) [is adduced] to include [the prohibition of employing] the resident foreigner.[92]

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86. That is, not a commandment obligating one to work, as the Hebrew imperative might suggest. Mendelssohn's immediate source was probably Abarbanel, although Ralbag also made a similar point.

87. The rabbinic source was cited via Rashi; cf. Mekh. *Yitro*, section 7.

88. Ibn Ezra.

89. Mendelssohn blended the comments of Ibn Ezra and Ramban.

90. Mendelssohn abbreviated and edited Ramban's commentary but retained the fundamental point.

91. Mekh. *Yitro*, section 7.

92. The reference was to Mekh. *Mishpaṭim*, section 20. This last sentence, explaining the rabbinic reading of these verses, was also from Ramban, though condensed and edited.

11. **for in six days** [*ki sheshet yamim*]: the grammarians said that this is the same as *be-sheshet* [in six],[93] and so it was translated by Jonathan ben Uzziel: "for in six days."[94] By way of truth, even time is included among the things created, and it is thus possible to interpret the words as they appear.[95]

therefore the Eternal blessed the day of rest [*ʿal ken berakh adonai et yom ha-shabbat*]: He imbued it with a surfeit of goodness, and commanded us to bless it and honor it.[96]

And declared it holy [*va-yeqaddeshehu*]: He commanded us that [the Sabbath] be for us a holy day unto God. Ibn Ezra wrote that [God] prepared this day for the soul to receive a surfeit of wisdom and holiness beyond that of the other days.

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12 Honor your father and your mother; that you may live long on the earth, which the Eternal your God will grant you.

Commentary

12. **that you may live long**, etc. [*le-maʿan yaʾarikhun*]: He promised them that when Israel observes this commandment, they will not be exiled from their land, and thus it is written *Father and mother they have dishonored in you*[*r midst*] °(Ez. 22:7).[97] The Sages said that with [the fulfillment of] this commandment God will fill our days in this world, and that [our days] will [also] be long in the world-to-come, which is eternally long, and that we will dwell forever on the good land that he will give us.[98] Sforno explained that this reward refers back to all the commandments that pertain [to the relationship of] man and God that

93. Ibn Melekh. The biblical verse read "for six days" without the preposition *be-* ['in'], and like earlier grammarians, Mendelssohn simply suggested that the absent preposition was to be assumed.

94. Onqelos, by contrast, had rendered this phrase "for six days. . . ."

95. While the exegetical point appeared in rather vague terms in Ramban, the substantive upshot was drawn from Maimonides' discussion of creation *ex nihilo* in *Guide* II:13 and the notion that God "brought into existence out of nothing all the beings as they are, time itself being one of the created things."

96. The comment was drawn from Ramban and his appreciative reference to Ibn Ezra's comment on Gen. 2:3; the phrase "surfeit of goodness" was taken directly from Ibn Ezra.

97. Ibn Ezra, with editing. The prooftext appeared in Ezekiel's prophecy regarding the destruction of Jerusalem, and it linked filial piety to national and political stability.

98. Ramban, with editing, based upon Qidd. 39b.

are mentioned in the first five pronouncements, and that He said **that you may live long**, etc., with regard to them all.[99]

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13 You shall not murder. You shall not commit adultery. You shall not steal. You shall not testify against your fellow man as a false witness.

Commentary

13. **you shall not murder** [*lo tirṣaḥ*]: killing without judicial sanction[100] is called murder [*reṣiḥah*], in German *Mord*, as in *the murderer* [*ha-roṣeaḥ*] *must be put to death* °(Num. 35:16–18), *have you murdered* [*ha-raṣaḥta*] *and taken possession* °(1 Kgs. 21:19), and *where righteous dwelt, but now murderers* [*meraṣṣeḥim*] °(Isa. 1:21). However, [the words] *harigah* [killing] and *mitah* [death] can sometimes be used extra-legally, as with reference to Cain, *and he killed him* [*va-yahargehu*] °(Gen. 4:8), and sometimes with legal sanction, as in [the context of the prohibition against bestiality] *you shall kill* [*ve-haragta*] *the woman* °(Lev. 20:16).[101]

you shall not commit adultery [*lo tinʾaf*]: the term *niʾuf* is used only with regard to a married woman, as it is written *the adulterer* [*ha-noʾef*] *and the adulteress* [*ha-noʾafet*] *shall be put to death* °(Lev. 20:10). And likewise Scripture says *the adulterous* [*ha-menaʾafet*] *wife, who took strangers instead of her husband* °(Ez. 16:32) °(Rashi). So it is in the German translation [*Ehebrechen*].

you shall not steal [*lo tignov*]: one who takes something secretly from his fellow man with the intention to keep it for himself is referred to as a *ganav* [thief]. The Sages said that this verse refers to kidnapping, since he is liable for capital punishment like the murderer and the adulterer.[102]

you shall not testify against your fellow man as a false witness [*lo taʿaneh bereʿakha ʿed shaqer*]: the meaning is that you should not testify against your fellow man with something that will turn you into a false witness, and so it is in the German translation.

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99. The idea invoked by Sforno was the rabbinic distinction between *miṣvot ben adam lamaqom*, i.e., the obligations one has to God, and *miṣvot ben adam le-ḥavero*, the rules and obligations that pertain to an individual's relationship to fellow men and women. See Mendelssohn's discussion at the end of the Decalogue.

100. *be-lo mishpaṭ*, which Mendelssohn substituted for Rashbam's *be-ḥinnam*.

101. Rashbam, with editing.

102. The second sentence here paraphrased Rashi.

14 You shall not have any desire for your fellow man's house; you should not have any desire for your fellow man's wife, for his slave, his female slave, his oxen, his ass, or for all that your fellow man possesses.

Commentary

14. **You shall not have any desire** [*lo taḥmod*]: Ibn Ezra wrote: "Many were astonished at this commandment, namely, how it is possible for an individual not to desire in his heart something beautiful, *pleasing to the sight* of his eyes (Gen. 2:9)? Let me offer a parable: A peasant of sound mind who saw a beautiful princess would not desire in his heart to sleep with her, since he knows that this is not possible. This peasant will not think to do the impossible like one of those deranged individuals who wishes that he had wings to fly skyward, just as a man does not desire to sleep with his mother, although she may be beautiful, for he has been trained from youth to know that she is prohibited to him. In this manner, every intelligent person must know that he will not obtain a beautiful woman or money with his own wisdom and knowledge, but only what God apportioned to him. Qohelet said to whom *his portion is given* (Ecc. 2:21), and the Sages said '[The number of] children, [the length of one's] life, and [the extent of one's] sustenance is not dependent on merit, but on *mazzal*.'[103] On account of this, the intelligent individual will neither crave nor desire. And since he knows that God has prohibited his fellow man's wife to him, she will be more exalted in his eyes than the princess is for the peasant, and he should therefore be content with his lot and not allow his heart to desire and yearn for something that is not his, for he will know that God did not want him to have this, and he will not be able to obtain it by means of his own power, stratagems, or machinations. He should thus put his trust in his creator who will sustain him and *do what is right in His eyes* (2 Sam. 10:12)." These are [Ibn Ezra's] words.

[Mendelssohn's overview of the Decalogue:]
With regard to the arrangement of the Ten Commandments,[104] we learn in the Mekhilta: "How were the ten pronouncements given? With five on one tablet and five on the other tablet. [On the first tablet] it was written *I am the Eternal your God* and opposite it [on the second tablet] *You shall not murder*, etc. These are the words of R. Ḥanina b. Gamliel. The Sages say: there were ten on one tablet and ten on the other tablet, as it is written *The Eternal spoke these words . . . He inscribed*

103. M.Q. 28a, with slight changes by Ibn Ezra. Ibn Ezra took *mazzal* to indicate astral influence; Mendelssohn presumably understood this as a broad statement of God's providence.

104. In this instance, Mendelssohn specifically used the biblical phrase *ʿaseret ha-devarim* from Ex. 34:28, which he translated as *Zehngebote*. The arrangement of the pronouncements on the two tablets was biblically noted in Ex. 24:12, 31:18, and 32:15ff.

them on two stone tablets °(Deut. 5:19), and *Your breasts are like two fawns, twins of a gazelle* °(Song 7:4), and *His hands are rods of gold, studded with beryl* °(Song 5:14)."[105]

As such, R. Ḥanina was also of the opinion that the statements were divided into two matching sets, five corresponding to five, as he mentioned there in the Mekhilta with regard to the connection between each of the first five [pronouncements] with the one adjoining it from the latter [five].[106] Biblical commentators have also mentioned that [the first] five are to honor God, that they include all the commandments that pertain [to the relationship of] man and God,[107] for the [fifth pronouncement,] *Honor your father* also relates to honoring God, as the Sages taught that the honor due one's parents is compared to the honor due the Omnipresent.[108]

The first pronouncement [v. 2][109] encompasses all commandments [that pertain to] the heart, to speech, and to deeds; for someone who does not, in his heart, believe in God is not at all bound by any commandment or duty of the heart. A person is required to bear God in mind at all times to honor Him: all that he does[110] should only be on account of His honor, and he should refrain from [transgressing any of] the negative commandments on account of God's honor alone. An individual should not give charity to the poor in order to honor the [charity] collector or that people would come to praise him; for then man's eminence would be greater in his eyes than that of God who gave him wealth and the surfeit of possessions from which he could give [charitably] and receive divine reward. And likewise, one who transgresses in secret so that it would not become known to the ruler or other people lest he be diminished in their eyes,[111] is deranged, as Scripture says [*Will He*] *not see, the one who formed the eye?* °(Ps. 94:10). But God sees what is hidden, things that a person cannot see openly, for God knows his thoughts and concealed [intentions]. Such a person fears a flesh-and-blood king lest he punish him, but will not fear the True King, in whose hand his soul rests in this world and the world-to-come.

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105. Mekh. *Yitro*, section 8.

106. Mendelssohn's citation of the passage in Mekhilta had omitted a longer midrashic discussion that drew specific meaning from each pairing. Mendelssohn's point here was that R. Hanina also subscribed to the meaningful nature of those pairings.

107. See *Be'ur* to v. 12 and n. 99. The notion that the first five pronouncements concern the honor due God is a theme that appeared in Ibn Ezra's introduction to this chapter; in Rashbam's comments on v. 7; and especially in Ramban's commentary on vv. 7, 11–13.

108. Paraphrasing Qidd. 30b. Reference to this rabbinic statement and the connection between honoring parents and honoring God appeared in the commentaries of Rashbam and Ramban; see the previous note.

109. The discussion that begins here was taken from Ibn Ezra's introduction to Ex. 20; but while Ibn Ezra framed his overview by noting the appearance of God's unique four-lettered name in the first five pronouncements, Mendelssohn, who denied that dogmas can be commandments, focused on the theme of honoring God.

110. I.e., the performance of any of the positively formulated commandments.

111. And yet, he remains unconcerned with how he appears in the eyes of God.

One who does believe in God, may He be blessed, but does not believe in the exodus from Egypt will not take upon himself the obligations of the Torah and the commandments unique to the nation that left Egypt, who are servants to God and His special possession. For this reason, [the first pronouncement] added *who led you out of the land of Miṣrayim*, as we explained.[112]

The second pronouncement proscribed *shittuf*,[113] as we wrote [earlier]; [it is second because] the disobedience[114] of one who does not believe in God is greater than the one who conjoins[115] another deity to Him.[116] And [similarly] in the third pronouncement, the disobedience of one who swears falsely is less than one who worships idolatry; he scorns God openly—perhaps doing so out of anger or want—but he may believe in his God and not conjoin anything to Him.[117] The fourth pronouncement concerns the sanctity of the Shabbat, to remember through [its observance] the account of creation,[118] and to acknowledge at all times that the world has a Creator and that He commanded us regarding this sign, as it is written *for it is a sign of binding between Me and you* °(Ex. 31:13). This is an important foundation of Jewish belief.[119] After this [comes the fifth pronouncement] regarding the honor due one's father and mother, who are partners with God in forming man, and if one does not honor them it is as if he fails to honor God. [The prescription] to honor one's father is positioned between the commandments that pertain [to the relationship of] man and God and those that pertain [to the relationship of] man and his fellow man.

From there onward begin the last five pronouncements [that govern relations] between man and his fellow man; God is not mentioned at all since they relate exclusively to human matters.[120] The first of these is the most severe, which is to separate the soul from the body and to spill the blood of a person whom God created in His image.[121] After this [came the prohibition against]

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112. These two sentences were Mendelssohn's.

113. See n. 28 above.

114. *pesha'*; our translation follows Mendelssohn's explication of in the *Be'ur* to Ex. 34:7.

115. *ha-meshattef*.

116. Although in this sentence Mendelssohn returned to Ibn Ezra's discussion of the pronouncements (see above, n. 109), he condensed and edited Ibn Ezra in a way that highlighted the particular concern with *shittuf*.

117. In his *Be'ur* to v. 7, Mendelssohn understood the *peshaṭ* of the third pronouncement to broadly proscribe any gratuitous utterance of God's name; here, citing Ibn Ezra, he followed the latter's understanding as a narrower proscription against swearing falsely.

118. At this juncture, Mendelssohn turned from Ibn Ezra's negative formulation, namely that one who works on the Sabbath contradicts the account of Creation, and inserted an edited version of Ramban's positive formulation from the latter's commentary on v. 8.

119. With the fifth pronouncement, Mendelssohn returned to Ibn Ezra's overview.

120. Mendelssohn inserted the last two sentences in order to frame the transition between the two sets of pronouncements. With regard to the mention of God's name, see n. 109.

121. The phrase "to spill the blood of a person whom God created in His image" and its allusion to Gen. 9:6 was added by Mendelssohn.

adultery, which is a violation with [regard to] the body[122] and to the honor due to parents for one will thereby come to deny truth and acknowledge falsehood; [the children of adulterers] will not know their fathers and will honor someone else,[123] just as those who worship idolatry, *who say to a tree "you are my father"* (Jer. 2:27) and who did not know their fathers who created them from nothing.

The following pronouncement [i.e., you shall not steal] concerns a violation with [regard to] someone's property, or, if the verse refers to kidnapping, a violation of a person's freedom, which is a divine gift more precious than all wealth and property.[124] After this, [Scripture] warned against perpetrating a violation with speech by means of false testimony, and in the tenth pronouncement about covetousness. One who does not covet something that does not belong to him will never come to harm his fellow man.[125] For it is on account of covetousness that an individual comes to contradict, to lie, to steal, to murder, and to commit adultery; to desecrate the Sabbath and the holidays, and to degrade his parents; and he comes to hate people and to envy them. But one who is not covetous will love people and honor them, and he will remove worries and grief and sighing; he will trust in the Eternal his God that *He will sustain him, and he can cast his burden upon Him* (Ps. 55:23). The pronouncements *I am* [*the Eternal your God*] and *you shall not have any desire* [*for your fellow man's house*] are like keys to all the commandments, which is why they came first and last °(all this was from Ibn Ezra and Ramban).

According to R. Hanina b. Gamliel[126] it would appear that this was why there were two stone tablets, since one was designated for commandments that pertain [to the relationship of] man and God, and the second for commandments that pertain [to the relationship of] man and his fellow man, as we have said. However, according to the opinion of the Sages who said that there were ten [pronouncements] on one tablet and ten on the other, it is unclear why the tablets were doubled. But it would appear that they meant that the first pronouncements were written on one tablet and the later ones in Deuteronomy were on the second tablet, since they contained many divergences and variations in the phrases and words. Both [versions] were uttered by the almighty, as the Sages said, "*always remember* [*zakhor*] [v. 8] and *be careful to observe* [*shamor*] (Deut. 5:12) were said in one utterance—something that the [human] mouth cannot

122. Mendelssohn read Ibn Ezra's *ones be-guf* (as printed in the Berlin 1705 edition) as *ḥamas be-guf*; from this point, the remainder of the discussion of adultery was drawn from Ramban's commentary on v. 13.

123. That is, they will end up honoring someone other than their biological father.

124. This ringing endorsement of personal freedom, and the sentence that follows, were Mendelssohn's formulations.

125. This sentence was from Ramban; the rest of the paragraph was Mendelssohn's.

126. After discussing the nature of the pronouncements, Mendelssohn turned back to the passage from Mekhilta (cited above) concerning their arrangement on the two tablets.

speak and the ear cannot hear."[127] For all synonymous words and phrases have some shared meaning though each individual word [also] has some particular meaning, as we have written many times.[128] This is the case for the discrepancies that appear in the Ten Commandments:[129] the essential reason and intended meaning [of the two versions] is the same, yet they diverge in terms of their particular denotation. [Thus,] the meaning of *zekhirah* [remembering] and *shemirah* [observing], *shav* (Deut. 5:17) and *shaqer* (v. 13),[130] and *taḥmod* (v. 14) and *titaʾveh* (Deut. 5:18)[131] are the same, but they are nonetheless different in some aspect, as when the Sages said that *remember* indicates a positive commandment, *observe* indicates a negative commandment;[132] [or] *remember* orally, *observe* it in the heart.[133] Similarly, [the covetousness indicated by] *ḥimmud* is with [reference to] deed, and that of *taʾavah* is with the heart.[134] [In all these cases,] the One Commanding intended [to include] both [meanings], also prompting both of those intended meanings in the mind of the listener with one utterance, this being the meaning of [the rabbinic statement,] "something that the [human] mouth cannot speak and the ear cannot hear." °(We will address ourselves to the details of those divergences in Deuteronomy when, God willing, we get there [in our commentary].) Therefore, the tablets were doubled *like two fawns, twins of a gazelle* (Song 4:5),[135] like twins who are identical in stature, temperament, and character, even though they are also different in some aspect. Or like a person's two hands, which share a purpose and function, each one [also having] a particular purpose. The Sages also compared the [two tablets] to two wedding attendants, a bride and groom, and to the two worlds.[136] This is enough said for one who understands.

Now, when Ibn Ezra cited in detail the discrepancies between the first pronouncements [in Exodus] and the later ones [in Deuteronomy] he erred greatly, for he mentioned that in the first, his slaves and female slaves came before his

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127. R.H. 27a, with parallels elsewhere.

128. See Mendelssohn's discussion in his introduction to *Megillat Qohelet*, p. 124 above.

129. Ibid., pp. 124–26.

130. Mendelssohn translated both as "false witness."

131. Mendelssohn translated both as "you should not have any desire."

132. This is attested in rabbinic sources, and is cited in Ramban's commentary on v. 8.

133. Sifra, *Be-Ḥuqqotai*, introductory section. The distinction is that between remembering the Sabbath by reciting the blessings that express the sanctification of the day, and observing the day by remaining cognizant of it.

134. The distinction is thus between the prohibition against acting on one's desires and the prohibition against covetous thinking alone. The formulation was drawn from Maimonides' *Mishneh Torah*, Gezelah va-ʾAvedah 1:10–11, which also appeared in Abarbanel's commentary on Ex. 20:14.

135. This scriptural verse had been cited in the Mekhilta above.

136. I.e., this world and the world to come. The rabbinic passage appeared in Exod. R. 41:6 and elsewhere, but the immediate source was Ramban's commentary on v. 13.

ox and ass, while in the second, his ox and ass come before his slaves and female slaves.[137] But it is not so, for even in the second [pronouncements] it is written *slaves and females slaves, his oxen and his ass* (Deut. 5:14). It is greatly bewildering how *such a difficulty came into the hands* of that scholar so very *concerned for the word of God* (Isa. 3:6, 66:2).

137. Cf. v. 10 to Deut. 5:14. Ibn Ezra made this comment in his introduction to Ex. 20.

Exodus 21:1–6

[Exodus 21–23 presented a variety of civil and criminal matters, ranging from laws to moral exhortations. It was the first extended section of biblical law, and prompted Mendelssohn's opening remarks regarding his exegetical approach to such sections.]

21:1 These too are the laws that you should set before them.

Commentary

Rashbam began his commentary on this weighty Torah portion that abounds with *halakhot* and laws with the following words: "Men of intelligence will know and understand that my intention was not to explain *halakhot*, even though they are the essence [of the Torah], as I explained in Genesis;[1] for *halakhot* and *aggadot* are derived from superfluous [language] in Scripture, and some [of these explanations] are to be found in the commentaries of R. Solomon [= Rashi], my mother's father. But my purpose was to explain the scriptural *peshaṭ*, and [so] I will explain the laws and *halakhot* in terms that conform to the ways of the world.[2] Nonetheless, the *halakhot* are the essence, as our Sages said '*halakhah* uproots *mishnah*.'"[3] These were his words.

Now, we too will take refuge beneath the wings of this eminent scholar and will not turn from the scriptural *peshaṭ* either right or left.[4] But we have not overlooked the general principle we adopted in the introduction to this book regarding the distinction between something contradictory and divergent,

1. Rashbam was referring to his introductory words to Gen. 1:1 and 37:2.

2. *ʿal pi derekh ereṣ*.

3. This last phrase, "*halakhah* uproots *mishnah*," has puzzled scholars, since the rabbinic words he was presumed to be citing actually read "*halakhah* oversteps Scripture [*miqra*]." Mendelssohn might have understood this phrase not as a direct citation but as a rabbinic notion that normative halakhic tradition always trumped scholarly interpretation.

4. The last phrase, alluding to Deut. 5:28 and 17:11, was a familiar biblical trope.

namely that the scriptural *peshaṭ* may diverge from the traditions of our Sages in the manner of interpretation, but it may not contradict them with regard to *halakhot* and laws. For it is possible that divergent [interpretations] may both be true, but if they contradict—if one is true then the second is necessarily false.[5]

Therefore, in every instance where something that appears evident from the Scriptural *peshaṭ* contradicts a tradition of our Sages concerning *halakhot* and laws, the exegete has an obligation to abandon the *peshaṭ* entirely and follow the path of true tradition, or to effect some compromise if he is able to do so successfully. This is the commitment that we have decreed for our commentary, and we shall guard it, *thanks to the Lord's benevolent care for us* (Ezra 8:18).

1. **these** [*ve-ʾelleh*]: Wherever the word *elleh* appears in Scripture, [that which follows] is distinct from what came earlier, but when the word *ve-ʾelleh* ["and these"] is used, [what follows] adds to what came earlier. [In this instance,] just as the preceding laws were from Sinai, so too these [laws that follow] are from Sinai °(Rashi, based on the Mekhilta).[6] The intended meaning is akin to what Ibn Ezra explained, that after the conclusion of the Ten Commandments God instructed Moses to go down to the people and inform them of the rest of the commandments and laws. [Ibn Ezra wrote:] "God said *such shall you say to the children of Yisrael* °(Ex. 20:19) and began to admonish [them] against idolatry,[7] and said that Moses should enact a covenant with them upon his descent [from the mountain], that the Eternal alone would be their God.[8] After [the admonishment regarding idolatry], God instructed him with regard to the laws and rules"[9] [that regulate relations] between an individual and his fellow man, as our Sages have written in Midrash Rabbah: "The entire Torah hinges upon justice; for this reason the Holy One, blessed be He, gave the laws [directly] after

5. See section II of *Or li-Netivah*, pp. 293–94 above.

6. Only the last sentence and the reference to Sinai was based upon Mekh. *Mishpaṭim*, section 1. Rashi drew the distinction of *elleh* and *ve-ʾelleh* from other midrashic sources; see, e.g., Tan. *Mishpaṭim* [§ 1] to Ex. 21:1.

7. Referring to Ex. 20:20.

8. Alluding to Ex. 22:19.

9. At this juncture Mendelssohn stopped citing from Ibn Ezra's comment and inserted a different interpretative strand drawn from Ramban. Ibn Ezra understood the underlying point of this section of Exodus (ch. 21–23) to be the establishment of the covenantal relationship of Israel and God; and while this relationship was predicated upon Israel accepting the laws pertaining to social justice set out in these chapters, those laws were book-ended with exhortations to uproot idolatry and a concern for the exclusivity of God's rule. Ramban, however, posited a more direct connection between the laws in Ex. 21–23 and the Decalogue by suggesting that these laws served to flesh out the Sinaitic proscription against coveting and desiring your fellow man's possessions (Ex. 20:14); as such, he emphasized the substantive importance of the regulation of interpersonal relations. By grafting Ramban's commentary onto that of Ibn Ezra, Mendelssohn carried forward his own comment in his overview of the Decalogue (see p. 379), wherein he suggested that both the first and last of the *dibrot* served as keys to all the other *miṣvot*.

the ten pronouncements."[10] After [the enumeration of these laws],[11] He again admonished [them] against idolatry in the section that began *I am sending an angel*, etc. °(Ex. 23:20), the essence of which is to remove any vestige of idols and graven images from the land of Canaan.

that you should set before them [*asher tasim lifnehem*]: Onqelos translated this as "that you should arrange before them," and likewise the Sages said that Moses should have them understand the meaning of these matters and their explanations, and that he should set the laws before them as [food on] a table that is set and ready to be eaten; therefore the verse said **before them** and not "to them," as in *there he set for them a statute and a law* °(Ex. 15:25).[12]

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2 When you acquire an Ivri slave,[13] he shall serve six years; and in the seventh he shall go out to freedom[14] without charge.

Commentary

2. **an Ivri slave** [*ʿeved ʿivri*]: Ivri is an adjective, and not a construct of [the word] slave; as such, the meaning is "a slave who is an Ivri" as it says elsewhere *If your brother the Ivri is sold to you* °(Deut. 15:12).[15]

when you acquire [*ki tiqneh*]: Scripture is speaking of a case wherein the court sold him [into slavery], as it is written *if he has nothing, he shall be sold as a slave for the theft* °(Ex. 22:2).[16] But when a man sells himself [into slavery] due to his poverty, it is written in Leviticus *If your brother near you is impoverished, and sells himself to you* °(Lev. 25:39) [followed by] *he shall serve until the jubilee year* °(Lev. 25:40). But here [in our case] Scripture says **he shall serve six years**—[this applies] when a court sold him. Some of our Sages harmonize the rule in the two

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10. Exod. R. 30:19.

11. In this last sentence, Mendelssohn shifted back to Ibn Ezra's comment and its focus on idolatry. Taken as a whole, this commentary on the verse, which blended Ibn Ezra and Ramban and presented them as natural extensions of Rashi, embodied Mendelssohn's assumption of the underlying coherence of medieval exegesis.

12. This comment was drawn from the formulations of Rashi and Ramban based upon the rabbinic passages in Mekh. and Tan. cited above in n. 6.

13. *Iwrischen Knecht*, i.e., a Hebrew slave, but maintaining the proper name in the original.

14. See the commentary and n. 21.

15. Mendelssohn restated in straightforward grammatical terms the question that Rashi, citing Mekh. *Mishpaṭim*, section 1, reproduced in the rhetorical formulation of *midrash halakhah*.

16. The case was that of an Israelite who was found guilty of theft but was too impoverished to compensate the rightful owner; the court then imposed servitude in place of his pecuniary obligation.

cases by means of a *gezerah shavah*,[17] such that if the jubilee year comes before the six years [of service are concluded], then the slave would go free in the jubilee year °(and according to this, even one who sells himself is not sold for more than six [years]),[18] but others [among the Sages] distinguish between the [two cases] °(Rashbam).

and in the seventh [*u-va-shevi'it*]: [this refers to] the seventh year from when he was sold as a slave. But perhaps the meaning is **in the seventh** year [of the sabbatical cycle]? One learns [from the words] **he shall serve six years** [that the first reading is correct].[19]

to freedom [*la-ḥofshi*]: Rashi interpreted this as "liberation," and he meant that the word *ḥofshi* was an abstract noun,[20] like freedom—liberation.[21] This is [also] what Rashbam wrote, and he proved that it must be thus: "If this word meant 'a free man,'[22] °(as was the opinion of Onqelos, who translated 'he should leave to be a free man,') then it would have to be vocalized with a *sheva* [under the *lamed*]—*le-ḥofshi*." There are those who interpret this as "to a place where he will be free," that is, he should leave his master's house for his own home °(Radaq in *Sefer ha-Shorashim*, s.v. *ḥet–peh–shin*).

without charge [*ḥinnam*]: from the root *ḥet–nun–nun*, with the addition of the letter *mem*; the meaning of the word is "with favor,"[23] [i.e.,] without monetary price.[24] It is a verbal adjective °(*adverbium*), which generally appears without a preposition, as in *sent me away empty-handedly* °(Gen. 31:42), *and made it so that you can walk uprightly* °(Lev. 26:13), *if you go contrarily to Me* °(ibid. v. 21), *you*

17. Qidd. 14b–15a. The *gezera shavah* was one of the thirteen formal hermeneutical principles employed in rabbinic literature; it was a commonly used mode of inference based on the occurrence of the same word in different biblical contexts, wherein a rule operative in one instance was extended and applied to another.

18. Mendelssohn added this parenthetical note to clarify that according to his view, the verse in Leviticus was narrowly interpreted to offer only a limited calendrical exception, which applied equally to both kinds of Israelite slaves.

19. Mekh. *Mishpaṭim*, section 1. In this instance (cf. his comments on **an Ivri slave** above), Mendelssohn chose to replicate the rhetorical style of midrash halakhah rather than the straightforward but substantively identical formulation of Rashbam.

20. *shem ha-miqreh*.

21. Mendelssohn's German translation, *zur Freiheit aus gehen*, thus followed Rashi's reading, and the awkward English rendition, "he shall go out to freedom," was intended to capture this.

22. I.e., with "free" appearing as an adjective, and reading the biblical phrase: "in the seventh he shall become a free man."

23. *ḥaninah*.

24. Drawn from Radaq, *Sefer ha-Shorashim*, s.v. *ḥet–nun–nun*, where he explained that when the slave left without having to pay, it was as if he found favor in the eyes of the master.

were sold for nothing [*ḥinnam*] °(Isa. 52:3), *they have often oppressed me* °(Ps. 129:1), and other similar examples °(see the introduction to the book).[25]

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3 As he came to his master by himself, so too he leaves by himself as well; [if] he was the husband of a woman, his wife leaves with him.

Commentary

3. **as he came to his master by himself** [*be-gappo*]: that is, if he wasn't married, as Onqelos translated it "if he comes alone." The word *be-gappo* is the same as *be-ḳenafo* ["his wing"] °(since *ḳanaf* in Aramaic is *gappin*),[26] [and so the verse means:] he came [into his master's service] just as he is—alone, with only his clothing, wrapped in the edges [i.e., "the wings"] of his garment °(Rashi). Others say that [the word *be-gappo*] is like *be-gufo* ["with his body"], as in *Saul's body* [*gufat shaʾul*] (1 Chron. 10:12), but [appearing] in a different morphological form; [in this reading,] the meaning is that nobody else came with him.[27]

so too he leaves by himself as well [*be-gappo yeṣe*]: [Saadya] Gaon said that [the verse] needed to include **as he came to his master by himself, so too he leaves by himself as well**, even though it had already said *he shall go out to freedom* (v. 2), on account of his wife, since [Scripture] had to include [the case] **[if] he was the husband of a woman** °(Ibn Ezra).[28] From this [superfluous phrase] the Sages expounded that if [at the time he became a slave] he was not married to an Israelite woman, his master may not give him a Canaanite slave-woman.[29]

the husband of a woman [*baʿal ishah*]: an Israelite.[30]

his wife leaves with him [*ve-yaṣeʾah ishto ʿimmo*]: Had she ever entered [the master's jurisdiction, such that Scripture had to state] that she might leave [with

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25. The reference was to the third part of *Or li-Netivah*; see *JubA*, 15,1:52–53, where Mendelssohn utilized some of the same examples.

26. This parenthetical aside was drawn from Ibn Ezra.

27. Ibn Ezra; although this medieval exegete dismissed Rashi's explication of *be-gappo* as being acontextual, Mendelssohn evidently saw merit in both possible interpretations.

28. The exegetical issue was one of superfluity, since the first half of our verse appeared to add nothing to what was already implied in v. 2. Ibn Ezra, citing Saadya Gaon, thus pointed out that these words were formulated with an eye to the case raised in the second half of the verse.

29. Mendelssohn used Rashi's formulation of the rabbinic source in Qidd. 20a, but he followed some supercommentaries to Rashi and added the word "Israelite" in order to explain the circumstances of the rabbinic statement.

30. Rashi.

him]?[31] Rather, Scripture indicates that [a master] who acquires an Israelite slave is also obligated to provide food for his wife and children °(Rashi). This is based on a rabbinic midrash, wherein the children entered [the master's jurisdiction] with the wife on the basis of a later verse, *He shall depart with his children from you* °(Lev. 25:41) °(Ramban).

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4 But [if] his master gives him a wife, and she bears him sons or daughters; the wife and her children remain with their master, but he leaves by himself.

Commentary

4. **his master** [*adonav*]:[32] We find that those practiced in Hebrew accord honor with the inflection of nouns, but not with verbs. [Whether] Scripture has *adon* or *adonim* [master or masters], it is [treated as] singular, [e.g.,] *in the hand of harsh masters* [*adonim qasheh*] °(Isa. 19:4).[33] In the case of the construct form, Scripture has [the plural] *adonav*, and not [the singular] *adono*, which never appears [in Scripture]. In the first person, [we have] m*y master* [*adoni*] *asked* (Gen. 44:19) but it is forbidden [in this instance] to use the plural, so that it not be confused with the Honored Name [of God];[34] and likewise, it is improper to address God with the singular, using the [profane] address *my master* [*adoni*] *asked* °(Gen. 44:19) °(Ibn Ezra).

gives him a wife [*yitten lo ishah*]: a Canaanite slave-woman, to bear slaves for the master.[35]

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5 If the slave should say, "I love my master, my wife, and my children; I do not wish to go free."

6 His master then takes him before the divine judges, and leads him to the door or the doorpost; and as his master pierced his ear with an

31. The husband's bondage nowhere impelled his wife (or children) to serve his master. In what sense, then, does Scripture mean that she "leaves" with her husband?

32. The word *adonav* appears in the plural form, although the predicate is in the singular. The comment sought to explain the biblical use of the majestic plural accompanied by a singular predicate.

33. The adjective *qasheh* was in the singular, qualifying the plural *adonim*.

34. In Scripture, *adoni*, referring to one's master in the singular, was used only in profane contexts; the plural *adonai* was with rare exception used only with reference to God.

35. Rashi, based on Mekh. *Mishpaṭim*, section 2.

awl, so must he serve him forever °(that is, until the year of general freedom[36]).

Commentary

6. **divine judges** [*ha-ʾelohim*]: judgment and judges are referred to by the name of God [*elohim*], as Moses said *for the judgment is God's matter* °(Deut. 1:17) and likewise Jehoshaphat said *you judge not on behalf of man, but on behalf of the Eternal, and He is with you when you pass judgment* °(2 Chron. 19:6), and the Psalmist said *God stands in the divine council; He judges among gods-on-earth* °(Ps. 82:1), that is, He will judge in the midst of a godly assembly. And similarly, Scripture has *the two men who have a legal dispute shall stand before the Eternal* °(Deut. 19:17). In Exodus Rabbah the Sages wrote: "when a judge sits in judgment and judges truthfully, God, as it were, leaves His topmost heaven and causes his divine Presence to be at his side, as it says *When the Eternal established judges for them, the Eternal would be with the judge* °(Judg. 2:18). °(From Ramban's commentary.)[37]

to the door, etc. [*el ha-delet*]: it was the custom of judges to sit at the city gate, which had doors and a bolt, and the intention [of Scripture] was that he should perform this ceremony in front of those who sit at the gate, piercing his ear as a sign of slavery.[38]

or [to] the doorpost [*el ha-mezuzah*]: the Sages taught that one should not bore the ear upon a doorpost, as it is written [*and you shall*] *thrust it into his ear and into the door* °(Deut. 15:17)—into a door and not a doorpost. The reason [the verse in Exodus] included **or to the doorpost** [was in order to teach] that they should bring him to the place where the door was attached to the doorpost, that is, the door should not be lying on the ground, but rather upright next to the doorpost. In our [text of] Targum Onqelos [the phrase] is rendered "toward the door that is toward the doorpost," and in the Targum Jonathan ben Uzziel it is rendered "toward the door that is the board of the doorpost."[39] It seems that their inten-

36. Namely, the Jubilee.

37. The comment was drawn almost entirely from Ramban, but Mendelssohn edited and modified the point. After citing Ps. 82:1 Ramban had added "that is, He will judge in the midst of a godly assembly, for God is the judge." In omitting the last phrase, Mendelssohn embraced the notion of earthly judges representing divine justice and the divine interest in justice on earth, but distanced himself from any suggestion of a more direct or immediate involvement on the part of God.

38. Combining Ibn Ezra and Rashbam.

39. The difference between these translations as they appeared in the Berlin 1705 Pentateuch was one letter: while the Onqelos had *de-levat mezuzta*, the Targum of Jonathan ben Uzziel had *de-luaḥ mezuzta*.

tion was to change the plain meaning of the word **or** [*o*], but there is nothing in the words of the Sages to compel such [a translation]. They only stated that the piercing had to be performed with a door, while Scripture was speaking only of the act of bringing him near, [i.e.,] that they should come near to the place of the door or the doorpost. Some texts have a version of Onqelos [that reads] "or toward the mezuzah," and this appears to me to be the correct version; and it is translated as such in the German.

pierce [*ve-raṣaʿ*]: this means he should perforate.[40]

awl [*ba-marṣeʿa*]: the name of a tool with which they perforate.[41]

forever [*le-ʿolam*]: We know that the word *ʿolam* in Hebrew is a designation of time, as in [the following examples]: *it already occurred* [*le-ʿolamim*] °(Ecc. 1:10)—[meaning, in earlier] ages; [and] *he must remain there* [*ʿad ʿolam*] °(1 Sam. 1:22)—until he grows up. Likewise, [in our verse] **so must he serve him forever** [*le-ʿolam*] means "and he will serve [his master] until the year of the jubilee," for Israel has no calendrical period longer than this, and his going free is as if the world is renewed for him °(Ibn Ezra).

40. Ibn Melekh.
41. Ibid.

Exodus 23:1–19

[Exodus 23 continued to present a variety of civil and criminal laws.]

23:1 Do not accept false reports; do not join with evildoers to be a witness for injustice.

Commentary

1. **Do not accept false reports** [*lo tissa shemaʿ shav*]: Just as the witness is proscribed [by] *you shall not testify against your fellow man as a false witness* °(Ex. 20:13), so too the judges are prohibited from accepting or listening to false testimony, but *must investigate and inquire* (Deut. 13:15).[1]

do not join, etc. [*al tashet*]: even if there are [already] two false witnesses, do not join them in order to testify as they do; [this proscription applies] even though there is no one to counter them and the case will [in any event] be settled according to what they say °(Rashbam).

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2 Do not follow the multitude toward evil. When you express your opinion regarding a dispute, do not be attached to the multitude to distort the law.

Commentary

2. **Do not follow the multitude toward evil** [*lo tihyeh aḥare rabbim le-raʿot*]: if you see wicked individuals perverting justice, do not say "since they are many I will go along with them"; and **when you express your opinion** [*ve-lo taʿaneh*],

1. Rashbam.

etc.—when the individual being judged asks you about that judgment, do not respond in a manner that goes along with the multitude with regard to that dispute, **to distort** [*lehaṭṭot*] the judgment from its truth. Rather, speak about the judgment as it really is, and let the multitude bear responsibility. This is how Rashi interpreted [these words] in order to render Scripture in a fitting manner according to its *peshaṭ*, and Rashbam's explication is similar. This interpretation is in line with the arrangement of the cantillation, for the word **multitude** [*rabbim*] is punctuated with a pausal *tipḥa*, while the word **dispute** [*riv*] is punctuated with the *reviʿa*, which is of a lesser pause, and as such the arrangement and parsing of the accents is as follows:

ve-loʾ taʿaneh ͡ʿal-riv || *linṭot* | *aḥare ͡rabbim* ||| *le-haṭṭot*

and this accords precisely with Rashi's interpretation.

The word **to distort** [*lehaṭṭot*] should not be explained in the same manner as the word **be attached** [*linṭot*], for *linṭot* is from the simple [*qal*] conjugation, meaning "to follow the multitude," while *lehaṭṭot* is a causative [*hifʿil*] conjugation, as in *cursed is the one who distorts* [= causes to distort] *the judgment* °(Deut. 27:19), and even in the absence of the word "judgment" as in *those who distort* [the cause of] *the resident alien* °(Mal. 3:5).[2] This being the case, the word **to distort** refers back to the word **dispute**, as if the verse was saying "do not express your opinion regarding a dispute [so as] to distort °(judgment), [in order] to follow the multitude." This is the core of the scriptural *peshaṭ*.[3] However, since [the syntax of] Scripture situates the word **to distort** after the words **to the multitude**, the Sages have interpreted this to mean that law is rendered according to a majority, as if Scripture commanded that one should follow the multitude if the matter is unclear. This can be inferred from the *peshaṭ* of the verse, since it warned not to **follow the multitude** only when it was **toward evil**. Likewise, [the verse] did not warn against following the [multitude], but rather, not **to distort** judgment, and from the negative statement you may infer the positive,[4] [i.e.,] that if the matter is unclear you are to follow the majority.

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3 Also, do not favor the common man in his dispute.

Commentary

3. **Also, do not favor the common man in his dispute** [*ve-dal lo tehdar be-rivo*]: Onqelos translated this as: "and for the poor man, do not show compassion in

2. The grammatical point and the prooftexts were drawn from Ibn Ezra.
3. *ʿomeq peshuṭo shel miqra.*
4. This is a rabbinic idiom.

his lawsuit," as it is written, *do not spare the poor, and do not show regard for the standing of a distinguished* [individual], but rather *judge your kinsman with justice* °(Lev. 19:15).[5]

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4 When you come across the ox of one who hates you or his ass wandering about, you must lead it back to him.

Commentary

4. **the ox of one who hates you** [*shor oyivkha*]: the letter *yud* [in the word *oyivkha*] is vocalized with a *ḥiriq*, and it is a verb in the present tense °(*deines Hassers*), for the word *ve-ʾayavti* (Ex. 23:22) is a transitive verb. The meaning [in the context of the verse] is that even though you know that he is your enemy, [you must not turn away]. This applies to the word *sonaʾakha* [in v. 5] °(Ibn Ezra).

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5 When you see the ass of your enemy breaking down under his load, then take care not to leave him alone; rather, help him unpack.

Commentary

5. **take care** [*ve-ḥadalta*]: [the meaning is] similar to *refrain* [*ḥadal lekha*] (2 Chron. 25:16) from doing the deed, and likewise *and fearfully observing* [to do] (Deut. 17:10).[6] The meaning [of the phrase *ve-ḥadalta me-ʿazov lo*] is: refrain from leaving it to him alone; rather undo the knots [of the ropes holding the load] with him, and leave the load to fall to this side and to that side [so that] the ass will be able to rise. This is the interpretation of Ibn Ezra, and the Sages likewise explained that the [last phrase of the] verse is speaking about unloading.[7] [But] Rashi explained that [the root *ʿayin–zayin–bet* in] the words *me-ʿazov lo* "means assistance, and likewise *restrained and helped* [*ʿazuv*] °(Deut. 32:36) and *they fortified* [*va-yaʿazvu*] *Jerusalem* °(Neh. 3:8).[8] But [the same word appearing at the end of the verse] *ʿazov taʿazov ʿimmo* means to unload the burden, like Onqelos' translation '[and you would refrain from] lifting it up for him,'[9] [meaning]—from lifting the load from [the animal]." These are Rashi's words. It would ap-

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5. Rashbam, with Mendelssohn's addition of Onqelos' translation.

6. Suggesting that the word *ve-ḥadalta* meant "take care to do."

7. Mekh. *Mishpaṭim*, section 20.

8. At this point Mendelssohn omitted a few lines from Rashi's commentary in order to maintain the focus on the interpretation of *ʿazov*.

9. *mi-le-mishqal leh*.

pear that Rashi is citing the translation of Onqelos to [the earlier words] *me-ʿazov lo*. But in the version that we have, Onqelos translated [this earlier phrase] as "from abandoning it,"[10] while translating the words *ʿazov taʿazov ʿimmo* as "you must abandon what is in your heart regarding him, and unload [the animal] with him." The German translator translated the verse according to the explanation of Ibn Ezra, which is the one that conforms to the scriptural *peshaṭ*.

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6 You must not distort the law of the needy in his dispute.

Commentary

6. **you must not distort** [*lo taṭṭeh*]: this is addressing the judge.[11]

needy [*evyonekha*]: from the word *oveh* [desires]; he is impoverished and longs for any good thing.[12]

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7 Keep away from a false thing; do not kill someone once he was established as innocent and righteous, for I will anyway not acquit the unjust.

Commentary

7. **keep away from a false thing** [*mi-devar sheqer tirḥaq*]: if, in your eyes, the judgment appears to be corrupted and the witnesses deceitful, but you have no means of disproving them, then distance yourself from that case and do not judge it at all.[13]

do not kill someone once he was established as innocent and righteous [*venaqi ve-ṣaddiq al taharog*]: [this should be understood] according to its Aramaic translation: "do not kill one who is innocent and one who has been declared not guilty by way of judgment." If the judgment ended with acquittal, you can no longer find him guilty and still execute him.[14] **For I will anyway not acquit the unjust** [*ḳi lo aṣdiq rashaʿ*]—and even if you acquit him, I [= God] will not acquit him, and he will die by the hand of heaven, as it is written *but God has so ordained it for him* °(Ex. 21:13).[15] I [God] have many means

10. *mi-le-mishbaq leh*, which is the version that appeared in the Berlin 1705 Pentateuch.
11. Ibn Ezra.
12. Rashi.
13. Rashbam.
14. Ibid., with Mendelssohn's editing and addition of Onqelos.
15. Rashbam, with editing.

by which to execute him for the death for which he is liable.[16] Our Sages said that **the innocent** is one who is found guilty in court but is afterwards absolved—he is innocent even though he was not exonerated in court; and **the righteous** is the one who is found not guilty in court but is later found to be liable.[17] Jonathan ben Uzziel translated this conversely,[18] and he translated [the last phrase] *ḳi lo aṣdiq rashaʿ*: "I would not have acquitted him had he been guilty."

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8 Do not take bribes, for bribes blind the clear-sighted and twist the words of the righteous.

9 Do not oppress the stranger; you know how difficult it is to be a stranger, for you were yourselves strangers in the land of Miṣrayim.

Commentary

8. **blind** [*yeʿavver*]: just as sight is applied from the eye to the heart as a metaphor for rational judgment, its opposite, blindness, is also applied metaphorically to a lack of comprehension of things that are clear and evident to the eye, as in *would you gouge out the eyes of this people?* °(Num. 16:14). The intended meaning [of the verse] is that a bribe would lead a man's heart away from the just path and would dim the light of his intellect, such that even a clear-sighted man, who represents the opposite of the blind, will not see things as they truly are; and in a court case, the honest words of the righteous will become crooked and twisted in his eyes.

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10 Six years you shall sow your field; and you shall gather its crops.

11 In the seventh year, however, you shall let it lie fallow and what grows of itself, completely leave, so that the needy of your nation consume it, and that the wild animals of the field may consume the remainder; you shall do the same with your vineyard and olive grove.

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16. This last line was drawn from Rashi.

17. Mekh. *Mishpaṭim*, section 20, and San. 33b; although Rashi cited the same rabbinic texts, Mendelssohn offered his own restatement.

18. "Do not kill one who is acquitted in court and who is later found guilty, or one who is found guilty [in court] and is later exonerated."

Commentary

10. **and you shall gather its crops** [*ve-ʾasafta et tevuʾatah*]: this connotes bringing it into a house, as in *so take it with you into your house* °(Deut. 22:2).[19]

11. **you shall let it lie fallow** [*tishmeṭennah*]: this refers back to *you shall sow your field* (v. 10)—[Scripture instructs you to] let your field rest by not sowing it; **and what grows of itself, completely leave** [*u-neṭashtah*]: [that is] its yield—abandon it to the needy of your nation to eat °(Ramban, Rashbam, and the Targum of Jonathan ben Uzziel).

with your vineyard and olive grove [*le-kharmekha le-zetekha*]: [do with these] as you do with the crops of grain. Scripture regularly mentions grain, wine, and oil, but this applies to all foodstuffs that grow from the ground.[20]

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12 Six days you may carry out your dealings, but on the seventh day you must cease; in order that your ox and your ass may also rest, and that the son of your female slave and the stranger may revive.

Commentary

12. **in order that . . . may rest** [*le-maʿan yanuaḥ*]: this refers back to **six days you may carry out your dealings**—do all your work in the house and field in the course of six days, **in order that** your ox and ass can rest on the seventh.[21]

son of your female slave [*ben amatekha*]: Scripture is referring to an uncircumcised slave.

and the stranger [*ha-ger*]—a resident foreigner.[22]

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13 Be careful with all that I have told you; do not make mention of the names of foreign gods; it should not be heard from your mouth.

Commentary

13. **be careful with all that I have told you** [*u-ve-khol asher amarti alekhem tishameru*]: according to the *peshaṭ*, this phrase is connected with the end of the verse

19. Rashi.
20. Rashbam.
21. Based on Ramban.
22. Rashi. The resident foreigner is a gentile who has forsworn idolatry; see the *Beʾur* to Ex. 20:10.

and repeats the warning against idolatry. It states that you should take great heed of all the many admonitions that I have spoken to you concerning other gods.[23] The Sages said: **be careful with all that I have told you; do not make mention of the names of foreign gods** teaches one that [the prohibition against] idolatry is to be weighed against all the other commandments together, and that one who is careful not to transgress this commandment is considered as having fulfilled them all.[24]

do not make mention [*lo tazkiru*]: do not cause those who worship that deity to mention him, and do not have him swear in the name of his foreign god.[25]

it should not be heard from your mouth [*lo yishamaʿ ʿal pikha*]: his name should not be mentioned at all; this is indicated in the book of Joshua °(23:7) [when it says] *do not utter the names of their gods or swear by them, and do not serve them*. Joshua added prohibitions so as to explain the admonition [of our verse], that he should not have anyone mention or swear by idolatry °(from the words of Ramban).

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14 Three times a year you shall celebrate for Me.

Commentary

14. **times** [*regalim*]: from the [singular] form *regel*, like *peʿamim* from *paʿam*; they mean the same thing, as in *you have beaten me these three times* °(Num. 22:28).[26]

you shall celebrate [*taḥog*]: holidays are called *ḥag*, from the verbal root *ḥet–gimel–gimel* [to celebrate], referring to the movement of those dancing and clapping in the joyousness of the holiday, *eating, drinking, and making merry* °(1 Sam. 30:16); that is, they are dancing, leaping, and whirling with joy °(Radaq, *Sefer ha-Shorashim*, s.v. *ḥet–gimel–gimel*, and Hai Gaon explained it this way as well).[27] Similarly, the sacrifice is called *ḥag* since it is sacrificed on a holiday, as in *the fat of my festival offering* °(below, v. 18), and likewise *bind the offering*

23. Ramban.

24. Rashi. This exegete implied, but never explicitly claimed, that this reading was based on a rabbinic statement, and the prefatory words "the Sages said" were added by Mendelssohn himself. The reference, however, remains unclear: Rashi scholars have not identified a source that connects the rabbinic teaching to this particular verse.

25. Ramban, edited and abbreviated.

26. Ibn Ezra and Rashi.

27. The reference to Hai Gaon appeared in Radaq's entry.

°(Ps. 118:27).[28] As such, when Scripture says **you shall celebrate**, it is as if saying "make an offering."

for Me [*li*]: for My Name alone; since there are recognized days when idolaters attend to their vanities, it is written **celebrate for Me**—alone °(Ibn Ezra).

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15 You shall observe the feast of the unleavened cakes [of dough];[29] you shall eat unleavened bread for seven days °(as I have commanded you) at the designated time in the month of ripened grain,[30] for in it you went forth from Miṣrayim; one must not appear before Me without gifts.

Commentary

15. **the feast of the unleavened cakes** [*et ḥag ha-maṣṣot*]: Scripture began with this [holiday] because it falls in the first [lunar] month of the year.[31]

as I have commanded you [*ka'asher ṣivvitikha*]: this is like a parenthetical statement: **you shall eat unleavened bread for seven days** °(as I have commanded you) **at the designated time in the month of ripened grain**.

designated time [*le-mo'ed*]: at the delimited and fixed time.[32]

month of ripened grain [*ḥodesh ha-'aviv*]: [the month in which] the produce fills out in its tender state. [The word *aviv*] is related to *av*, the early ripening and the first maturation of the fruit °(Rashi).[33]

one must not appear before Me without gifts [*lo yera'u fanai reqam*]: [the meaning of] this is not like *my face shall not be seen* [*yera'u*] °(Ex. 33:23), for there it is the face that is [the subject] of "appearing," while here the intended meaning is

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28. Based on Ibn Ezra; see also Radaq to Mal. 2:3.

29. *ungesäuerten Kuchen*, instead of the expected *ungesäuerten Brod*, "unleavened bread," which he employed elsewhere (e.g., Ex. 13:6). In the *Be'ur* to Ex. 29:2, Mendelssohn explained that there were three different kinds of bread, distinguished by the preparation of the dough. The translation here aligned with his rendering of *'ugot maṣṣot* (Ex. 12:39), "cakes of dough, [since] dough that had not fermented is called *maṣṣah*."

30. *ähren Monats*, or *Ährenmonats* (lit.: "the month of ears [of ripened grain]"); cf. the *Be'ur* to Ex. 9:31 and 13:4.

31. Ibn Ezra.

32. Mendelssohn's source for this comment appears to be Judah Loew b. Beṣalel (Maharal), *Gur Aryeh* to Gen. 18:14.

33. Rashi (following the version printed in the Berlin 1705 Pentateuch).

as Onqelos translated it, "you shall not appear before Me," where the [subject of] "appearing" are those coming to the house of God. Evidence for this is *he will appear before the Eternal* °(1 Sam. 1:22) and also *all your males shall appear* °(v. 17 below, and Ex. 34:23); the phrase *et pene adonai*[34] means "before God" °(from the words of Ibn Ezra).

without gifts [*reqam*]: this is an adverb,[35] and the intended meaning is "without a sacrifice."

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16 And further, the feast of the harvest with the first-fruits of your work in the field, of what you sow in the field; and the feast of the gathering of the fruits at the end of the year, when you gather in the results of your work from the field.

Commentary

16. **and further, the feast of the harvest** [*ḥag ha-qaṣir*]: this is the holiday of the Feast of Weeks.[36] This verse refers back to [the command] **you shall observe** in the previous verse, and so the intended meaning is: and you shall further observe the feast of the harvest.

the first-fruits of your work in the field [*bikkure maʿasekha*]: the first-fruits of the wheat harvest, and on the holiday of the unleavened cakes it is the first-fruits of the barley; the length of time between the first-fruits of the barley and the wheat is about seven weeks °(Ibn Ezra). Rashi wrote that **the first-fruits of your work in the field** is the time of the bringing of the first-fruits, for the offering of the two loaves that were brought on the Feast of Weeks made it permissible to use the new harvest of wheat for the meal offering and to bring the first fruits into the Temple, as Scripture states: *and on the day of the first-fruits*, etc. °(Num. 28:26).

feast of the gathering [*ve-ḥag ha-ʾasif*]: this is the holiday of Sukkot at the time of the gathering, when *the threshing floors are piled with grain, and vats shall overflow with new wine and oil* (Joel 2:24). Scripture commanded them to live in booths as a reminder that in the wilderness they lived in tents and had neither land and

34. This was the phrase that appeared in the citations from Ex. 34:23 and 1 Sam. 1:22.

35. In the interest of producing a readable translation, Mendelssohn added the object "gifts" and dispensed with an adverb; a more literal translation would have been "do not appear before Me emptily." The comment offered the grammatical point as a corrective.

36. Rashi.

grain, nor wine and oil. As such, all three festival-times are connected to the fruits of the land—ripening, harvest, and gathering °(Rashbam).

end of the year [*be-ṣeʾt ha-shanah*]: after the year ends and the next year begins.[37]

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17 Three times a year; each man-folk shall appear before the presence of the Lord, the Eternal.

Commentary

17. **man-folk** [*zekhurkha*]: the males among you.[38]

the Lord the Eternal [*ha-ʾadon adonai*]: He is the Lord of the earth, and the blessing reaches you from Him. Therefore come before Him as a servant who appears before his master at designated times, and bring a gift as a sign of submission and servitude.

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18 You shall not offer the blood of my sacrifice °(namely, that of the Pesaḥ) with leavened bread; and the fat of my festival offering should not be left overnight until morning.

Commentary

18. **you shall not slaughter**[39] **the blood of my sacrifice with leavened bread** [*lo tishḥaṭ ʿal ḥameṣ*]: do not sacrifice the passover-offering on the fourteenth of Nissan with leavened bread, [which is to say] as long as one member of the group assigned to eat of the passover-offering still has leavened bread in his possession.

blood of my sacrifice [*dam zivḥi*]: blood is not slaughtered, and thus the Sages said that this is a proscription against [the cultic act of] sprinkling the blood with leavened bread [still present],[40] for all activities associated with the offering are referred to as sacrificing [*zeviḥah*]; and so it is translated in German.

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37. Ibn Ezra.

38. Rashi.

39. In the lemma here, Mendelssohn replaced the word *tizbaḥ* (sacrifice) with *tishḥat* (slaughter) from a parallel verse in Ex. 34:25. The error stemmed from the fact that this comment was based on Ramban, whose discussion referred specifically to the slaughter of the passover-offering.

40. Up to this point, the comment was based on Ramban.

the fat of my festival offering should not be left overnight, etc. [*ve-lo yalin ḥelev ḥaggi*]: off of the altar, since if it is placed on the wood pile it is not rendered invalid at night, as it is written, [*that remains*] *upon its fire-place on the altar all night* °(Lev. 6:2).[41]

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19 You shall bring the first of the early fruits of your land to the house of the Eternal your God; do not boil any young animal in its mother's milk.

Commentary

19. **the first of the early fruits of your land** [*reʾshit bikkure admatekha*]: [this applies to the first-fruits of] the seven species mentioned in Deuteronomy, [as it is written] *then you shall bring from the first fruit of all the species* °(Deut. 26:2).[42]

young animal [*gedi*]: this [prohibition] applies to all meat with milk, as the Sages have explained in the tractate Ḥullin.[43] It is written three times in the Torah, and the Sages have expounded it [to include three separate actions]: one for the prohibition of eating [meat cooked with milk], one for the prohibition of deriving benefit [from such an admixture], and one for the prohibition of cooking [them together].[44]

Now, one should not ponder why the Holy One prohibited meat with milk, for God decreed many commandments for us without revealing their rationale. However, it should suffice for us to know that they are commanded from Him, may He be blessed, and inasmuch as we have accepted upon ourselves the yoke of His kingship, we are obligated to do His will. The benefit [of such commandments] lies in their performance, not in knowing their reason. I say this not, heaven forbid, as one who denigrates the honor of the great Torah scholars who endeavored in such speculations and sought to understand the reasons of the commandments whose meanings were not revealed, for we know that their intention was only for the sake of heaven.[45] However, it is patently clear that for all the breadth of their understanding they offered only weak reasoning with no

41. Based upon Rashi.

42. Rashbam. The source for the limitation of the commandment of the first fruits to the seven species enumerated in Deut. 8:8 was Sifre § 297.

43. Rashbam.

44. Rashi.

45. Mendelssohn referred here to the legacy of some medieval scholars, including Maimonides, who sought to articulate the reasons behind the commandments (*taʿame ha-miṣvot*). Although the wisdom and efficacy of their endeavor had long been questioned, Mendelssohn was careful to express respect for their stature despite his negative assessment of their quest.

basis; they were unconvincing, and in the end it was possible for the evil inclination to refute their words and for the gentiles to use them to taunt Israel, as the Sages said with regard to the commandments whose reasons were not revealed. To us, believers in God and his Torah, the Sages put it well: "can one perhaps say that they were empty commandments? Scripture therefore states *I am the Eternal* (Lev. 18:4)—I decreed them, and you have no right to question them."[46]

46. The passage appeared with some variation in a number of rabbinic texts, although Mendelssohn seems to have preferred a later variant included in Tan. *Mishpaṭim* [§ 7]. Mendelssohn's eschewal of the rationalization of the commandments is consistent with other pronouncements regarding the nature of the commandments. His comment, in fact, touched on two long-standing and related concerns: the emphatically particularistic practices enjoined by the Torah, and the limits of human comprehension. Mendelssohn did not regard the commandments as a means of conveying abstract truths, at least not directly. The Decalogue, as he explained at length, did not teach abstract truths about God's existence but rather that Israel was "His treasured people" who had accepted, and were irreversibly subject to, the yoke of the commandments. Particular commandments thus referred to the particular historical experiences of the Israelites, or to the need to subject oneself to God's kingship. In *Jerusalem*, Mendelssohn asserted that while Jews were welcome to reflect on the commandments and surmise their reasons, such speculation was secondary to the obligation to observe them: "reverence for God draws a line between speculation and practice that no conscientious man may cross." See *JubA*, 8:198–99; Arkush, *Jerusalem*, 133–34.

Exodus 31:1–3

[Exodus 25–30 dealt with the construction of the Tabernacle and its implements. Exodus 31 turned to the appointment of a master craftsman charged with the execution of the work.]

31:1 The Eternal spoke to Mosheh as follows:

2 See, I have appointed °(summoned) by name, Beṣalel son of Uri, son of Ḥur, from the tribe of Yehudah.

3 I have filled him with a divine spirit, with wisdom, with reason, with knowledge, and with all skilled artistry.

Commentary

2. **See, I have appointed by name** [*re'eh qara'ti ve-shem*]: [I have appointed] Bezalel, to fulfill My design,[1] as one would say in German *berufen* [summon], or *namentlich ernennen* [specifically appoint]; and so, the past tense [of this phrase] comes in place of the present tense, as [if the verse reads:] "Now, I am designating Bezalel by name. . . ." Or, it may be that [the phrase] was employing the true past tense, as our Sages said in the midrash: "God showed Moses the book of Adam and told [Moses] 'I have designated [the future role of each and] every person from that moment, and even Bezalel was designated from that moment'";[2] for He, may He be blessed, *announces the generations from the start* (Isa. 41:4), as in the manner of *Before I formed you in the womb I chose you, before you were born I set you apart* °(Jer. 1:5).

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1. Rashi. The comment was trying to cast the sense of the verse as "in order to fulfill My design, I am appointing an individual named Beṣalel."

2. The midrash appeared in Exod. R. 40:2, but it was cited here in paraphrastic form from Ramban's commentary. The remainder of the comment was also based on Ramban, with editing.

3. **I have filled him with a divine spirit** [*va-ʾamalle oto ruaḥ elohim*]: The verb "filled" takes two objects, like the verse *Let us give our father drink* °(Gen. 19:32).[3] Onqelos translated **divine spirit** as "prophetic spirit," and Jonathan ben Uzziel translated it as "holy spirit." The correct reading is that **with wisdom, with reason, and with knowledge** serves as an explanation of **divine spirit**, just like the verse *the spirit of the Eternal shall alight upon him* °(Isa. 11:2). And what is the explanation of "the spirit of the Eternal"? [That verse continues:] *the spirit of wisdom and understanding*, etc.

wisdom [*ḥokhmah*]: Knowledge of the means by which we obtain something that we seek is termed *ḥokhmah*, whether this thing is theoretical or practical; and the sciences are accordingly divided into the theoretical and practical. If that which is sought is intrinsically evil, the individual who knows how to obtain it is called "wise at doing evil [*ḥakham le-haraʿ*]," as in the verse *they are wise at doing evil* [*ḥakhamim . . . le-haraʿ*] °(Jer. 4:22). However, when one is referred to simply as "wise," he is one who knows the means to obtain the genuine good, which is the true aim.

reason [*tevunah*]: [this refers] to the ability to deduce one thing from another and to apprehend some unknown proposition by means of a known proposition. The word is parsed from the root *bet–yud–nun* because one who knows how to differentiate between [*ben*] things and what it is that distinguishes one thing from another will apprehend the intelligible propositions.

knowledge [*daʿat*]: the disposition to receive forms as they are, whether these forms are discernible by the senses or transcend sense perception, is called knowledge °(see our interpretation of Genesis 4:1, in the *Beʾur* to the word "knew").

and with all skilled artistry [*u-ve-khol melaʾkhah*]: the practical ability to produce the desired object in a way that is commensurate with the intended purpose is called **skilled artistry** °(*Kunst*, *Kunstgeschicklichkeit*). Where the skilled artistry requires considerable thought in mathematics, geometry, and measurements of proportion and size, or in knowledge of beauty and pleasure, it is referred to [in Scripture] as *clever artistry* [*meleʾkhet maḥashavet*] (Ex. 35:33).[4] One who knows the secret and purpose of a thing knows how to design it properly with that purpose in mind, this being [the scriptural phrase] *to devise thoughts*

3. In these two instances, the verb took both the direct and indirect objects but without markers or prepositions.

4. *sinnreichen Künsten*.

[*laḥshov maḥashavot*] (Ex. 31:4);[5] this is the theoretical part of skilled artistry. The practical part is the craftsmanship, the deftness, and the skill needed to turn the thought into something concrete, and that is [scripturally indicated by the word] "to make" [*la-ʿasot*].[6] Ramban wrote: "The reason [for the divine appointment of Beṣalel] is that in Egypt, the Israelites were crushed by their work with mortar and bricks; they did not learn to work with silver and gold and to cut precious stones, and did not even see them at all. It was a wonder that there was among them a man greatly knowledgeable in working with silver and gold, gem cutting and woodcarving, embroidery and weaving. For even among trained artisans one will not find an expert in all those crafts; and individuals who knew and regularly practiced those crafts would not be able to produce fine and beautiful work if they constantly had their hands in mire and mud. Moreover, Beṣalel was exceedingly wise and understood the secret of the Tabernacle and all its implements—why they were commanded and their referents . . . etc.[7] [The Sages] also said that Beṣalel knew how to combine the letters with which heaven and earth were created, for the Tabernacle alludes to these [creations], and Beṣalel knew and understood its secret." These were Ramban's words.

5. *Gedanken aus zu denken*.
6. See, e.g., Ex. 35:32–33, translated there as *zu arbeiten*.
7. At this point Mendelssohn omitted part of Ramban's commentary.

Exodus 32

[Exodus 32–34 recounted the sin of the golden calf and its reverberations in the relationship of God, Israel, and Moses.]

32:1 The people saw that Mosheh dallied long in coming down from the mountain; the men gathered upon Aharon and spoke to him: "Get up! Make a divine being for us that will go before us °(that is, will lead us), for this man Mosheh, who has led us out of the land of Miṣrayim—we do not know what happened to him."

Commentary

1. **the people saw** [*va-yar*] etc. Commentator's note: everything I will explain with regard to the episode of the golden calf is taken wholly from what the Rabbi said to the Khazar king °([*Kuzari*], part I, sections 92 to 98) and from [the commentaries of] Ramban and Ibn Ezra. [They are presented] with concision and some rephrasing, as is my way. I did not cite the names of these great scholars in each and every instance, since I am telling you in advance with a general statement that these words are borrowed and not *of my own devising* (Num. 16:28).

dallied long [*boshesh*]: [this is to be interpreted] as per Onqelos to mean lateness [*iḥur*], as in *so long* [*boshesh*] *in coming* °(Judg. 5:28) or *they waited a long time* [*ʿad bush*] °(Judg. 3:25) °(Rashi). There is, however, a subtle difference between "late" [*aleph–ḥet–resh*] and "dally" [*bet–shin–shin*], for someone who delays and tarries beyond a defined or acceptable period of time is referred to as "late," but someone who is so late that the one expecting him is dismayed and despairs of him is referred to as "dallying."

Now, Moses left them and took no provisions, and they also saw that the manna does not descend upon Mount Sinai. [Moreover, they presumed that]

Moses parted company with them only to return within the day, for he himself did not know when he would return as God [only] told him *Come up to Me on the mountain* (Ex. 24:12) and remain there until I give you the tablets of the covenant.[1] They waited for Moses and looked forward to his descent for forty days, then saw that he was so late that those expecting him were frustrated in their trust and hope and despaired of him, thinking that he would never return again.

gathered [*va-yiqqahel*]: every [use of the verbal form of] *qehillah* followed by [the preposition] *ʿal* connotes rebellion.[2]

make a divine being for us, etc. [*ʿaseh lanu elohim*]: understand and consider that they did not say "make gods for us who will bring forth life and death and provide for us and will perform miracles and wondrous things," for it was not the people's intention to eschew the worship of the heavenly God. Rather, they wanted another Moses to lead them. They said: "**this man Mosheh** who showed us the way *from Egypt until now* (Num. 14:19)"—for all the travels were *on God's command through Moses* (Num. 9:23)—"behold, he is lost to us and will no longer return; now let us have another guide in his place."[3] They chose *a product of human hands* (Deut. 4:28), like idols they used to make for themselves in those days to convey their needs,[4] for at that time it was widely accepted that a divine influence would adhere to those idolatrous images and would cause them to prophesy.[5]

we do not know what happened him [*loʾ yadaʿnu meh hayah lo*]: "[we do not know] what accident befell this man who left and has yet to return to us; it must be that some calamity befell him and he died.[6] Let us now make something permanent that will never degenerate and pass away like him."[7]

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1. These two sentences combined passages from the *Kuzari* and Ibn Ezra's introduction to this chapter.

2. Ibn Ezra had noted that the combination of this verb and preposition indicated something negative; Mendelssohn added the political coloration in line with his interpretation below. See the *Beʾur* to v. 25.

3. Ramban.

4. Rashbam.

5. *Kuzari* I:97.

6. The possibility that Moses perished was suggested by Rashi and Ibn Ezra.

7. The notion that the people were seeking something impervious to physical deterioration was articulated by Israel Zamosc in his commentary on *Kuzari* I:97. This, in his view, explained why Aaron immediately asked for gold jewelry, a material presumed to be lasting and indestructible. Mendelssohn owed this point to Zamosc, but he took issue with his teacher's interpretation of the denouement; see his commentary on v. 20.

2 Aharon spoke to them, "Remove the golden earrings that are in the ears of your wives, sons, and daughters, and bring them to me."

Commentary

2. **remove** [*parequ*]: this is an imperative [in the plural], from the form *pareq* in the singular, like *barekhu* from the [singular] form, *barekh*.[8]

in the ears of your wives [*be-ʾozne neshekhem*]: Aaron thought to himself: "the women and children care for their ornaments; perhaps the matter will be delayed, and in the meantime, Moses may arrive." But they did not wait, and removed them of their own accord °(Rashi). Aaron knew that their initial intention was not to engage in idolatry. He therefore did not make an effort to oppose them and to give his life *for the zeal of the Lord of Hosts* (Isa. 9:6), which he would have undoubtedly done had he known that their intentions were to abandon the worship of the God of Israel °(and heaven forbid that *Aaron the holy one of the Eternal* [Ps. 106:16] would create idolatry, as a few exegetes have supposed). However, since there was a horde of other peoples[9] mixed in with the Israelites—as Aaron said at the end, *you know the people, that it is occupied with evil things* °(below, v. 22)—he worried that the evil thoughts would overcome them and they would err in idolatry, as in truth happened. For this reason, he sought to put them off and to prevent the matter until his brother arrived.[10]

3 All the people removed the golden earrings that were in their ears; and they brought them to Aharon.

4 He took from their hands, cast it in a form, and produced a molten calf; they said: "Yisrael! These are your gods that have taken you up from the land of Miṣrayim."

Commentary

3. **removed** [*va-yitparequ*]: this [reflexive verb] means removing something [from oneself]; when they took them from their ears, they were thus separated from

8. Rashi.
9. *ʿerev rav* (Ex. 12:38), which Mendelssohn translated as *eine Menge allerlei Leuten*.
10. Based upon Ibn Ezra.

their earrings;[11] *descharyèr* in French °(Rashi); this is *décharger* [in contemporary French], and in German, *entladen*.[12]

4. **cast** [*va-yaṣar*]: from the word *ṣurah* [form], as in *he fashioned* [*va-yaṣar*] *the two columns* °(1 Kgs. 7:15).[13]

in a form [*ba-ḥereṭ*]: This is a tool used by smiths with which to engrave and etch figures into gold, like a scribe's stylus that etches letters on boards and tablets, as in *and write on it with a common stylus* [*be-ḥereṭ enosh*] °(Isa. 8:1). This is what Onqelos translated: "he fashioned it with a graving tool (*be-zifa*)," using the language of *ziyuf*, a tool with which to engrave letters and figures in gold which is called *nèyel* in French,[14] for imprinting seals °(that is, to engrave and impress) °(Rashi). Ibn Ezra explained the word *ba-ḥereṭ* as image, like *be-ḥereṭ enosh* (Isa. 8:1)—in the image of a person. Radaq wrote similarly in his entry for the root *ḥet–resh–ṭet* in *Sefer ha-Shorashim* that some explain *ba-ḥereṭ* as a mold. The meaning is that they produced a mold of bitumen as is the way of the smelters; they made it in the form of a calf, cast in the gold, and a calf was produced.[15] The German translator rendered it accordingly.

these are your gods, etc. [*elleh elohekha yisraʾel*]: there is no fool in the world who would think that this gold that was until today in their ears, and was made into a molten calf only today, is what brought them forth from Egypt; rather, they said that the power of this form and the spirit that permeated it brought them forth from there. This is indeed the error of all those who *serve wood and stone and products of human hands* (Deut. 4:28).[16]

Yisrael! . . . your gods [*elohekha yisraʾel*]: the verse does not say "these are our gods" [but rather **your gods**]; from here we learn that the horde of other peoples who came forth from Egypt were the ones who rebelled against Aaron. They made this molten calf and afterwards led Israel astray °(Rashi). This is the sense of Scripture according to its *peshaṭ*, that the multitude of the nation began to break up into separate groups, with a plethora of opinions and thoughts, and some of them strayed from their initial intention, which was to produce an im-

11. Rashi was addressing the linguistic anomaly of the reflexive verb (*va-yitpareku*) followed by the indefinite particle and direct object (*et nizme ha-zahav* [the golden earrings]). His suggestion was to read the particle *et* as the preposition *min* (from), taking the verse to mean that the people separated themselves from their earrings.

12. I.e., to unload.

13. Ibn Ezra; see also Rashi.

14. Also spelled *neel* or *niel*, referring to a kind of niello-work.

15. This last sentence was from Rashbam.

16. Ramban, with additions.

age that would lead them. [Instead,] they made it a tangible object set before them, toward which to turn when relating the wondrous deeds of their God, just as the Philistines did regarding the ark when they said that God was there.[17] And so they drifted from one thing to the other and from thought to thought, until they began to direct their worship and prayers to it and to offer sacrifices before it in the manner of all idolaters.[18] They transgressed [the commandment] *You shall have no other gods before Me* °(Ex. 20:3) as we explained there: that Israel was prohibited from *shittuf* and the worship of anything other than God. And this is written [later in Scripture:] *They changed the veneration of God to the likeness of a bull that eats grass; they forgot their helper, God*, etc. °(Ps. 106:20–21). They forgot His word that they had been commanded.[19]

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5 When Aharon saw this °(namely, that they took the calf not as a leader but for a God), he built an altar before it; Aharon announced: "Tomorrow is a festival to honor the Eternal."

Commentary

5. **when Aharon saw** [*va-yar aharon*]: when he saw that what he feared came to be, and that some of them had already shifted from their initial thought to idolatry, he cleverly reckoned to build an altar there to return the thoughts of the nation from that object of worship to God, may He be exalted. That is why he said **"tomorrow is a festival to honor the Eternal"**—that the worship and sacrifices would be devoted to the Unique Name of God in order to extend His favor to the power of the image, so that in their worshipping God there *a spirit from on high would pour out on him* (Isa. 32:15) as it emanated upon Moses; but their intention in sacrificing and worshipping would not be to anything *other than the Eternal alone* (Ex. 22:19). This is what [the Sages] wrote in Leviticus Rabbah:[20] "Aaron said . . . 'Seeing that I am building the altar, I will build it in the name of the Holy One, blessed be He,' as it is written **tomorrow is a festival to honor the Eternal**; it does not say 'a festival to honor the calf,' but rather 'a festival to honor the Eternal.'" It may be that Aaron said **tomorrow** to delay them, [hoping] that perhaps Moses would arrive and they would abandon the calf.[21]

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17. See 1 Sam. 4:6ff.

18. Drawn from *Kuzari* I:97.

19. The last three sentences were taken from Ramban.

20. Lev. R. 10:3.

21. Beginning with the second sentence, this comment was drawn from Ramban with significant editing. Mendelssohn omitted some esoteric material, then rearranged and melded four different passages from Ramban's comments on vv. 1 and 5 to produce a seamless and clear reading.

6 They rose early the next morning, brought many sacrifices, [and] also sent along joyous offerings; the people sat down there to eat and drink, and rose from there to engage in wantonness.

Commentary

6. **[they] brought many sacrifices** [*va-yaʿalu ʿolot*]: the verse did not say "they brought it sacrifices" or "sent along joyous offerings for it," because some of the [people] were intending [to sacrifice] to the name of the Holy One, blessed be He, as Aaron had said. But others among them acted in a corrupt manner and sacrificed [the offerings] to the calf. It is with reference to this group that God said to Moses, *they have worshipped it, they have slaughtered sacrifices to it* (below, v. 8), for they were the sinners.[22]

to eat and drink [*le-ʾekhol ve-shato*]: they all sat down to eat to the point of satiety and to drink to the point of inebriation, as they would on feasts and special days, and afterwards they **rose from there to engage in wantonness** with their idols.[23] The Sages said that this language suggests [that they engaged in] idolatry, sexual licentiousness, and the shedding of blood.[24]

7 The Eternal spoke to Mosheh: "Go down, for your people, which you have led out of Miṣrayim, have sinned greatly."

8 "They have deviated very soon from the path that I commanded them, they made for themselves a molten calf; they have worshipped it, they have slaughtered sacrifices to it, and in addition spoke, 'Yisrael! these are your gods that have taken you up from the land of Miṣrayim.'"

Commentary

7. **spoke** [*va-yedabber*]: this is an expression of harshness, as in *he spoke* [*va-yedabber*] *harshly with them* °(Gen. 42:7) °(Rashi). It appears that they[25] derived this [interpretation] from our verse, in which [the word] **spoke** appears without [be-

22. Ramban.
23. Ibid.
24. This was a paraphrase of Rashi, based on Tan. *Ki Tissa* [§ 20].
25. Mendelssohn was presumably referring to the Sages and the section in Tanhuma (see previous note) from which Rashi drew his point.

ing followed by] the word "saying,"[26] even though He subsequently speaks [to Moses] in the second person—**go down**—and presents the words as they were uttered from the mouth of the speaker; this is not the usual [biblical] idiom, as I have explained to you many times. This too[27] proves what we explained, that the initial thought [of the Israelites] was not to engage in idolatry; for [God] did not tell Moses to **go down** on the day that they made the calf, at which time Moses surely would have descended immediately. But when the nation sacrificed and bowed to it and engaged in wantonness, then He said **go down, for your people have sinned greatly**.

go down [*leḵh red*]:—from your greatness, since I only bestowed greatness upon you for [Israel's] sake °(Rashi); this is from tractate Berakhot °(32a). In the printed edition of Rashi, he added: "at that hour, Moses was banished by the heavenly court," and this is from Genesis Rabbah.[28] That midrash cites a sublime parable regarding an emissary from a province who was the object of the king's anger due to the wrongdoing of [the people] who dispatched him, even though he [= the messenger] did absolutely nothing wrong. [However,] this line does not appear in the manuscript [version] of Rashi, and in its stead there is an addition to [the first half of] the verse above, [which reads as follows:] "**spoke**—this connotes harshness, as in *he spoke harshly with them*; at that hour, Moses was distraught because the Holy One, blessed be He, spoke harshly to him." This is taken from midrash Tanhuma.[29]

for your people have sinned greatly [*ḵi shiḥet ʿammeḵha*]: the verse does not say "the people have sinned greatly," but **your people have sinned greatly**; [God said:] "you accepted the horde of other peoples of your own accord and converted them without consulting me; you thought it a good thing that proselytes should attach themselves to the divine Presence. [But] they became corrupt and corrupted others" °(Rashi).

8. **from the path that I commanded them** [*min ha-dereḵh asher ṣivvitim*]: [that is, from the commandment] not to make any graven images and not to worship [gods] other than Me, even with *shittuf*,[30] as is the practice of the nations who

26. In other words, deviating from the familiar biblical pattern of "And the Lord spoke . . . saying"; this explanation was offered by Mizrahi's supercommentary on this verse.

27. The comment, from this point onward, was drawn from Ramban.

28. Mendelssohn was referring to the Rashi printed in the Berlin 1705 Pentateuch. The rabbinic reference was to Exod. R. 42:3 (and not Genesis Rabbah); but cf. Tan. *Ki Tissa* [§ 22], which has the precise wording of the passage cited.

29. Tan. *Ki Tissa* [§ 20]. The manuscript to which Mendelssohn referred was presumably one of those mentioned in *Or li-Netivah* (see above, p. 295) but subsequently lost, since the text in the Prague Bible only partly matched this alternative version of Rashi.

30. Cf. the *Be'ur* to Ex. 20:2, 3, and 32:4.

worship idolatry; rather, [they were commanded] to devote all the sacrifices and prayers and honor to Me alone.

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9 The Eternal spoke further to Mosheh: "I have observed this people, that they are a stiff-necked people °(that is, obstinate, unmanageable)."

10 "So desist from entreating further, that My anger may blaze forth upon them and that I may destroy them; then I will make of you a great nation."

Commentary

9. **stiff-necked** [*qesheh ʿoref*]: they turn their stiffened necks to those who reprove them, and refuse to listen.[31] This is like a man who goes on his way and does not turn back to someone calling to him. This is the apt metaphor, since the Israelites worshipped idols in Egypt and God sent them prophets, saying *Cast off, each of you, the loathsome things before your eyes, and do not defile yourselves with the idols of Egypt*, for such was it written °(in Ez. 20:7);[32] and now they have returned to their images and idols.

10. **so desist from entreating further** [*ve-ʿattah haniḥah li*]: we have yet to hear that Moses prayed on their behalf—and yet He says "**desist**!" Rather, [God] created an opening and informed him that the matter is dependent on him—if he prays on their behalf, he would not destroy them.[33] The Sages likened this to a king who was angry with his son and beat him severely, while the king's beloved friend sat before him but was afraid to say something to him. The king said [to his son]: "were it not for this beloved friend sitting before me, I would kill you." [The friend] thought: this matter is dependent on me. He stood immediately and saved [the son] °(Ber. 32a).

that I may destroy them [*va-ʾakhallem*]: *the wrath has gone forth* (Num. 17:11) upon them all, *for the greater they were, the more they sinned* (Hos. 4:7), and *God knows the secrets of the heart* (Ps. 44:22); it is revealed and known to Him that most [of the people] sinned by having evil thoughts, and were it not for this, God would not be angry with all of them, to wipe them out.[34]

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31. Rashi.
32. The metaphor and the citation from Ezekiel was from Ibn Ezra.
33. Rashi.
34. This was drawn in broad terms from Ramban.

11 Then Mosheh pleaded before the Eternal his God; he spoke: "why, O Eternal, should your anger blaze forth upon your people, that you have led from Miṣrayim with great power and a mighty hand."

Commentary

11. **pleaded** [*va-yeḥal*]: this is an expression of prayer and supplication;[35] it usually appears [in tandem] with the word face [*panim*], as in *entreat the favor of a great man* [*yeḥallu pene nadiv*] °(Prov. 19:6).[36] According to Radaq's *Sefer ha-Shorashim*, s.v. *aleph–ḥet–lamed*, the words *I entreat* [*aḥale*] *my master* °(2 Kgs. 5:3) [and] *would that* [*aḥalai*] *my ways were firm* °(Ps. 119:5) are from the same root.

your anger blaze forth upon your people [*yeḥereh appekha be-ʿammekha*]: to destroy all of them, even those that are your people and not my people; **that you have led** [*asher hoṣeʾta*]: and not me.[37] This is the language of the Sages in Genesis Rabbah:[38] "[Moses said:] 'Did you not say to me "for <u>your</u> people have sinned greatly"—and not <u>my</u> people? If my people sinned and not your people, I henceforth ask **why, O Eternal, should your anger blaze forth upon your people**.'" The Sages there offered another splendid statement:[39] "When Israel committed that act, Moses arose to appease God and said: 'Lord of the universe! They have produced an assistant for you, yet you are annoyed with them? Why, this calf which they produced will be your assistant; you will cause the sun to rise, while it will cause the moon to rise; you will look after the stars and it will see to the constellations; you will cause the dew to descend and it will cause the winds to blow; you will make the rains fall, while it will be responsible for the growth of plants.' Said the Holy One, blessed be He, to Moses: 'Moses, you err as they do, for the calf is worthless!' 'If so,' Moses replied, 'then why are you angry with your children?' This is why it says, **why, O Eternal, should your anger blaze forth upon your people**."

from Miṣrayim [*me-ʾereṣ miṣrayim*]: where they all worship lambs, and your children learned from them (Exodus Rabbah).[40]

12 "Why should Miṣrayim say, 'You led them out to their misfortune in order to do away with them on the mountains and to wipe them off

35. Radaq, from the *Sefer ha-Shorashim* cited in the next sentence.
36. Ibn Ezra.
37. Rashbam.
38. The source is Exod. R. 43:7 and not Genesis Rabbah.
39. Ibid., 43:6.
40. Ibid., 43:7.

the earth.' Desist from your blazing anger and alter your counsel with regard to the evil with which you threaten your people."

Commentary

12. **why should [Miṣrayim] say** [*lammah yoʾmeru*]: do it for the sake of your Name, that it not be profaned.[41]

to their misfortune [*be-raʿah*]: with bad intention.[42]

alter your counsel [*ve-hinnaḥem*]: form another thought, to benefit them—and so the German translation—**with regard to the evil** [*ʿal ha-raʿah*] that you thought to bring upon them.[43]

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13 "Remember your servants Avraham, Yiṣhaq, and Yaaqov,[44] what you swore to them by your own self, and told them 'I will make your seed as much as the stars in heaven; and this entire land, of which I have spoken, I will give to your seed, and they shall possess it as their inheritance forever.'"

14 The Eternal altered his counsel; with regard to the evil with which he had threatened his people.

Commentary

13. **you swore to them by your own self** [*nishbaʿta lahem baḳh*]: you did not swear to them with something that can be destroyed—not by the heavens nor by the earth, not by the mountains nor by the hills—but with your own self [*baḳh*], for you exist and your oath exists forever, as it was said *By Myself have I sworn, says the Eternal* °(Gen. 22:16), and to Isaac it was said *I will uphold the oath that I swore to your father Abraham* °(Gen. 26:3) and to Jacob *I am the all-powerful God* [*el shaddai*], *be fertile and increase* °(Gen. 35:11)—[God] swore to him with the all-powerful name [*el shaddai*] °(Rashi, from Ber. 32a).[45]

and told them, 'I will [make your seed] as much . . . of which I have spoken' [*va-tedabber alehem arbeh . . . asher amarti*]: [the verse mentions] speech with-

41. Rashbam.
42. This echoed Abarbanel's comment.
43. Rashi.
44. Mendelssohn substituted Yaaqov for Yisrael.
45. Cf. the *Beʾur* to Ex. 6:3 and 34:6.

out [being followed by the word] "saying," after which [the verse] provides the words as they were said. According to the proper [biblical] idiom, [the verse should have had]: "you have spoken to them, saying: 'I will make [your seed] as much . . . '" or "you have spoken to them [that you would] make,[46] etc., and this entire land, of which you have spoken, you will give to their seed."

As to when this prayer took place in the chronological sequence of events—whether before Moses came down from the mountain or after he went up a second time—I have found in [the writings of] the Sages a variety of opinions. In the *Yelammedenu* to the fourteenth chapter of Numbers there is the following:[47] "Do not attempt to appease your friend at a time of anger. From whom do we know this? From Moses; when Israel produced the calf, the Holy One, blessed be He, said to him: 'Go down [from the mountain].' Moses responded, 'It is a time of anger; I have no need to speak at this time.' He descended from the mountain, and he examined them in three ways as it is explained there. After he had waited so long, he returned to the Holy One, blessed be He, and appeased him."[48] °(This was copied from additions to Rashi in a manuscript in my possession.)[49] If so, the prayer here is the same one mentioned in Deuteronomy °(9:26) with some difference in language,[50] although their meaning is the same; and there, [the prayer] was mentioned after his descent from the mountain. This was the [exegetical] approach taken by Ibn Ezra, for in his opinion Moses would not pray on behalf of Israel as long as there was still idolatry in their midst °(and this is what the Sages delicately referred to as a "time of anger"). Rather, Moses descended and destroyed the calf and afterwards returned to pray for forty days; and [according to this reading] there is no chronological order in [the narrative of] the Torah.[51]

However, in Exodus Rabbah we learn:[52] "Moses said: 'If I leave Israel [to their fate] and descend they will not survive; so I will not move from here un-

46. Using the infinitive as a kind of indirect, third-person speech.

47. Yal. Sh. § 743.

48. The last line of the citation was a paraphrase of the denouement; it too may have been copied from the Rashi manuscript referred to in the next line.

49. This addition is not found in the Prague Bible; it was presumably drawn from the second (unidentified) manuscript in Mendelssohn's possession. Cf. n. 29 above.

50. "I prayed to the Eternal and said 'Lord! O Eternal! Do not destroy your people and your nation that is your inheritance, whom you redeemed in your greatness; [and] led from Miṣrayim with a mighty hand.'"

51. See Ibn Ezra to v. 11, but note that what Mendelssohn presented here was actually Ramban's recapitulation of Ibn Ezra's position. The notion that scriptural narratives are not always organized along strictly chronological lines (*en muqdam u-meʾuḥar ba-torah*) is found in rabbinic literature (see, e.g., Pes. 6b), but it was subject to debate among medieval scholars. While Rashi and Ibn Ezra embraced this notion in their analysis of Pentateuchal narratives, Ramban largely resisted its broad application.

52. Exod. R. 42:1; Mendelssohn cited the midrash from Ramban's commentary.

til I seek mercy for them'; whereupon Moses immediately began to argue in their defense, etc." This is the approach taken by Ramban. In his opinion, there were two prayers. One was before Moses' descent, immediately after God said *desist from entreating further, that My anger may blaze forth upon them* (v. 10) [after which] God altered His counsel with regard to the evil with which he had threatened to destroy them; but He was not [fully] reconciled with them, and only said "I have altered My counsel not to destroy them." Since Moses now had a reprieve, he descended [from the mountain] and burned the calf and killed its worshippers,[53] and afterwards said to the nation *I will now go up to the Eternal, perhaps I can obtain forgiveness for your sin* (v. 30) so that He may forgive you entirely. This [reading] is suggested by the *peshaṭ* of the scriptural verses. An explanation of what was said regarding this prayer in Deuteronomy will be found [in our commentary] there, with God's help.

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15 Mosheh however turned and went down the mountain, [and] he had the two tablets of testimony[54] in hand; tablets that were inscribed on both sides—they were inscribed on this and the other side.

16 The tablets were a work of God; and the writing was a writing of God, engraved in the tablets.

Commentary

15. **tablets that were inscribed** [*luḥot ḳetuvim*]: they were referred to as inscribed because of the letters inscribed on the tablets.

they were inscribed on this and the other side [*mi-zeh u-mi-zeh hem ḳetuvim*]: in the Palestinian Talmud, tractate Sheqalim, the Sages disagreed regarding the way in which the tablets were inscribed.[55] Some said that there were five [pronouncements] on one tablet and five on the other,[56] and according to this opinion, the letters passed through from one side to the other, and this is the meaning of **inscribed on both sides**. They were read on one side in their usual sequence, and from the other side in reverse, and thus R. Hisda stated °(Shab. 104a and Meg. 2b) "The [letters] *mem* and *samekh* of the tablets stood [in place] by a miracle,"[57] and he said °(ibid., Shabbat) "The writing on the tablet was

53. Referring ahead to vv. 20, 26–28.
54. *Zeugnis Tafeln*; Mendelssohn had this as two words.
55. P. Sheq. 6:1.
56. See the overview of the Decalogue in the *Be'ur* to Ex. 20:14.
57. Since Rav Hisda believed that the tablets were hewn right through the stone, the Hebrew *samekh* (formed like the English o) and the final *mem* (looking roughly like a square) would have

read from the front and from the back, as for example *n–b–b* [would be read] *b–b–n*, *r–h–b b–h–r*, *s–r–v v–r–s*." Others said that there were ten [inscribed] on one tablet and ten on the other, and it might be, according to this opinion, that five of them were inscribed on one side and five on the other side, this being the meaning of **inscribed on both sides**. According to the opinion of R. Simeon b. Yohai there were twenty on each tablet, with all ten pronouncements being inscribed on each side, and this is the meaning of **inscribed on both sides**. The verse then went on to add **they were inscribed on this and the other side** to indicate that everything that was inscribed on one side was also inscribed on its opposite side. There was another opinion, that of R. Simai, that there were forty on each tablet, and according to him the verse is stating that the ten statements were written once from the top down, and a second time from the bottom up, and likewise on the other side, resulting in forty on each tablet. This was indicated by the scriptural repetition: [the verse had] **inscribed on both sides** [followed by] **they were inscribed on this and the other side**. The meaning of **both sides** is on the two surfaces of the tablets, [while] **on this and the other side** [means] on the two edges [of the same surface], top and bottom.[58] In R. Simai's opinion, it was perfectly reasonable that the pronouncements appeared so many times: whichever way Moses held the tablet in his hand one could read all ten statements with one look without having to turn it around or from side to side °(from the author of *ʿEn Yaʿaqov* in tractate Sheqalim).[59]

16. **were a work of God** [*maʿaseh elohim hemmah*]: He made them Himself,[60] unlike the second tablets that Moses carved;[61] Scripture mentions the distinctiveness of the tablets here to indicate that even so Moses did not refrain from breaking them on account of his anger.[62]

engraved [*ḥarut*]: the meaning of *ḥarat* with a *tav* or *ṭet* is the same; they both mean engraved, *entalyer*[63] in French °(Rashi); in German *einhauen*, *einschneiden*.

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a "center" unattached to the rest of the tablet to hold it in place. He thus asserted that the "center" remained miraculously suspended in place. See the discussion above in section I of *Or li-Netivah*, p. 258 and n. 91.

58. That is, the ten *dibrot* were written once beginning at the top of the tablet, and then, turning it around, a second time from what was the "bottom" of the tablet. Looking upon the tablet, one would see the top text right side up, and the bottom text upside down.

59. See n. 55 above.

60. Lit.: He made them in His glory. Rashi.

61. Ibn Ezra.

62. Ramban.

63. Or: *enteilier* (entailler in modern French), referring to a kind of niello-work. Cf. the commentary on v. 4 above.

17 Yehoshua heard the sound of the people in their exultation; he said to Mosheh, "there is a cry of war in the camp."

18 Mosheh said: "it is not the exclamation-cry of victors, nor that of the vanquished; [it is] the sound of responsive-singing I hear."

Commentary

17. **in their exultation** [*be-reʿoh*]: [this word is] from the [related] stem *teruʿah*. Just as *I will make my opinions known* [*essa deʿi*] (Job 36:3) is from [the root] *yud–dalet–ʿayin*, so *reʿoh* is from *yud–resh–ʿayin*, as in *why do you utter such cries* [*lam-mah tariʿi reʿa*]? °(Micah 4:9) °(Ibn Ezra). The meaning is "raising their voice," for they were cheering, rejoicing and shouting.[64]

18. **it is not the exclamation-cry of victors** [*en qol ʿanot gevurah*]: this sound does not appear to be the exclamation of the mighty shouting "victory!" nor the sound of the weak shouting "whoa!" or "flee!" °(Rashi).

vanquished [*ḥalushah*]: this is a noun, like bravery.[65]

sound of responsive-singing [*qol ʿanot*]: this is like *to sing* [*le-ʿannot*] *on the maḥalat* °(Ps. 88:1)—the sound of bards and those singing responsively to each other, raising their voices.

I hear [*anokhi shomeaʿ*]: he recognized the musical quality of the sounds, [namely] that what he was hearing was the sound of responsive singing. And so the Sages said in an aggadah: "Moses said [to Joshua]: 'Can it be that one who will one day exercise his authority over Israel cannot distinguish between one sound and another!?'" Now Moses, due to his great humility, did not convey [the truth of] the matter to Joshua, for he did not want to mention Israel's disgrace; rather, he told him that he heard the sound of merriment °(from the words of Ramban).

19 As he came closer to the camp, he saw the calf and the dances; then Mosheh became angry, and he threw the tablets from his hand and broke them beneath the mountain.

64. Rashi.
65. Ibn Ezra.

Commentary

19. **the calf** [*ha-ʿegel*]: that [Scripture] mentioned above, and **the dances**, which were not mentioned.

he threw the tablets from his hand [*va-yashleḳh mi-yadav*]: from his great zealousness he broke the [tablets of] testimony that were in his hand,[66] as if he was saying "these are not fitting to give testimony." This is as the Sages said: "If, with regard to the *pesaḥ* offering, which is but one of the commandments, the Torah stated *no foreigner shall eat from it* °(Ex. 12:43), etc." °(Shab. 87a and Yev. 62a).[67]

beneath the mountain [*taḥat ha-har*]: at the foot of the mountain.[68]

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20 He took the calf that they had made and calcinated it in the fire, and ground it until it became completely fine; [he] scattered the powder on the water, and gave the children of Israel to drink from it.

Commentary

20. **he took the calf** [*va-yiqqaḥ et ha-ʿegel*]: some say that the word *va-yisrof*[69] means that it was melted by fire. There is no need for this explanation, for there is a substance that, when added to the fire with the gold, immediately results in its being burned; it is blackened and cannot be reconstituted as gold. This is something tried and true °(Ibn Ezra). Chemists of the recent generation also observed this phenomenon and stated that when one combined salt of tartar with sulfur, the gold would crumble in fire to the point that it becomes as fine as dust. They [also] said that nitre °(natrium is a kind of alkaline salt of the type that is inert, found in the lands of the East) will also turn gold into powder. The treatment of metals with fire and the separation of their compound elements such that they are susceptible to grinding and scattering is called *Kalzination* [calcination], and this is how it is translated into German.[70]

66. Ibn Ezra.

67. Mendelssohn drew this comment from Rashi, but did not cite the upshot of that rabbinic passage: "[Moses said;] 'If, with regard to the *pesaḥ* offering, which is but one of the commandments, the Torah stated *no foreigner shall eat from it*, then when the entire Torah [is at issue], and [all] Israel are apostates, how much more so [they are unfit to partake in it].'"

68. Rashi.

69. Mendelssohn translated this as "calcinated"; it would otherwise mean "burned."

70. Mendelssohn was drawing upon the work of the German physician and chemist Georg Ernst Stahl (1660–1734), who studied the calcination of metals, including gold, as a means of promoting his phlogiston theory of elements. Stahl himself discussed this biblical verse in light of his scientific experiments in *Opusculum Chymico-Physico-Medicum* (Magdeburg, 1715), 585–607. Note that Mendelssohn's naturalistic explanation served two purposes. First, in the *Beʾur* to v. 1 above he had

[he] scattered [*va-yizer*]: this is an expression of dispersal, similar to: *sulfur is strewn* [*yezoreh*] *upon his home* °(Job 18:15), and *in vain is the net spread* [*mezorah*] °(Prov. 1:17).[71]

and gave the children of Israel to drink from it [*va-yashq et bene yisra'el*]: the Sages said that [Moses] intended to test them like wives suspected of adultery, [and those guilty would be stricken with] distended bellies and sagging thighs.[72] Ibn Ezra wrote that by these means the Levites could identify those who worshipped the calf, since, as we have already explained, only a small number [of the people] had evil intentions, while most set out with good intentions, as per their reasoning.[73] This too is proof that not all agreed to partake in idolatry, for when *the servant of the Lord* (Deut. 34:5) returned to them, they allowed him to destroy the calf and did not resist at all. Had [the calf] been a god for everybody, the nation would hardly have abandoned its god to be destroyed by fire.[74]

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21 Mosheh said to Aharon, "what has this people done to you—that you have brought it this great sin?"

22 Aharon said: "Do not be angry my master; you know the people, that it is occupied with evil things."

23 "They said to me, 'Make gods for us that will lead us; for this man Mosheh, who has led us out of the land of Miṣrayim—we do not know what happened to him.'"

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explained that the Israelites were desperate for a lasting and indestructible replacement for Moses, and gold, as Israel Zamosc had suggested, served this end precisely. Zamosc, however, believed that gold could not naturally be destroyed by fire, and he thus understood the subsequent reduction of the gold to be a miraculous occurrence, a fitting reassertion of Moses' unique access to God's infinite powers. Mendelssohn's scientific explanation served up a very different narrative; by destroying something that was widely believed to be indestructible and pointing up the ephemeral nature of all earthly forms, Moses was delivering a lesson regarding the nature and ever-present danger of idolatrous forms. Second, Mendelssohn was almost certainly aware of contemporaries like Voltaire who mocked Scripture by pointing to all manner of implausible occurrences, including the impossibility of reducing gold to dust (see Voltaire's *Dictionnaire Philosophique, Portatif* [London, 1765], 288). Mendelssohn's explanation may well have been intended to deflect such skepticism.

71. Rashi.

72. Based on Ramban; the connection between our verse and the drinking ordeal of the *soṭah* was made in A.Z. 44a.

73. Mendelssohn revised Ibn Ezra's comment, that "all of them had good thoughts."

74. The last sentence was drawn from Ramban's opening comment on this chapter.

24 "Now when I said to them 'who has gold? then they took it from their jewelry and gave it to me'; I threw it in the fire, and so this calf emerged."

Commentary

21. **done to you**, etc. [*meh ʿasah lekha . . .*]: Note that Moses did not accuse him of his own sin against God in making a molten god. He only mentioned the failure of the nation, for Moses knew and his heart was convinced with regard to his brother's righteousness, that Aaron's intention was not evil. But he did rebuke him with regard to the guilt of the nation, and said: "what evil **has this people done to you**; how did they transgress and sin against you, that you caused them to stumble and **brought** upon them **this great sin**?"[75]

22. **that it is occupied with evil things** [*ki be-raʿ hu*]: they always proceed in an evil way, testing the divine Presence °(Rashi).

24. **and so this calf emerged** [*va-yeṣe ha-ʿegel ha-zeh*]: that is to say, it resulted in this evil matter that my master sees. I did not know their evil thoughts, for they initially asked for a guide in the place of my master, but now they worshipped it and sacrificed to it. [This was stated] in general terms as **and so this calf emerged**.[76]

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25 Mosheh saw the people, that it had gone wild; for Aharon himself had made them wild, to the disgrace of their adversaries.

Commentary

25. **that it had gone wild** [*ki faruaʿ hu*]: the word *paraʿ* always connotes the undoing or disruption of order, as in [*the priest*] *shall dishevel* [*paraʿ*] *the woman's head* °(Num. 5:18), meaning that he will undo the plaits of her hair;[77] and likewise, *with the lack of vision, the people are unrestrained* [*yipparaʿ*] °(Prov. 29:18), meaning that civic law and order will be undone. Moses saw that the people were like a throng of rebels undoing moral restraint and good sense. They had already rid themselves of civic rule and proper order—none of them obeying those greater than themselves, and *no one showing regard for the old* (Deut. 28:50) or the worthy.[78]

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75. Drawn from Ramban, with reformulation.
76. Ibid.
77. Drawn from Rashi's explanation to Num. 5:18.
78. This comment was broadly informed by all the medieval exegetes, but Mendelssohn imbued his comment with more political overtones, linking idolatry with political disorder. This

for Aharon himself had made them wild [*ki feraʿoh aharon*]: Aaron was responsible for this disruption of order since he too appeared to be uncertain as to whether or not his brother would return, and produced another guide in his place. Due to him the circumstances of the people deteriorated and became confused; they behaved like unruly and crazed individuals, without good sense and moral restraint.

to the disgrace of their adversaries [*le-shimṣah be-qamehem*]: this would be a disgrace for them in the mouths of all who rise against them °(Rashi). Onqelos translated the word [*qamehem*] as "for their generations" as if saying "those who will rise [*qamim*] after them," in line with *and now you have arisen* [*qamtem*] *in place of your fathers* °(Num. 32:14).[79] Moses thus saw that even if he would continue to rebuke them they would not take heed or listen to his words, as is the way with a gathering of rebels and those who spurn restraint. How would his voice prevail over the *sound of the people in their exultation* (above, v. 17) who cavort and dance in a throng like those devoid of sense? He thought: they will not be restrained with words—it is time to punish them and to sanctify the Great Name in public.

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26 Mosheh then stood himself at the gate of the camp [and] said "whoever is true to the Eternal, come to me!" Then all the children of Levi gathered themselves to him.

Commentary

26. **Mosheh then stood himself** [*va-yaʿamod mosheh*]: Such is the practice in any encampment, that when it remains in place for a year huts and gates are erected for the camp.[80] Moses stood at the gate of the camp so that those who became incensed would gather themselves to him.

whoever is true to the Eternal, come to me [*mi la-ʾadonai elai*]: [whoever is true to the Eternal] should come to me.[81]

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was echoed in *Jerusalem* when he specifically referred to the episode of the golden calf: "Now the fundamental law was transgressed; the bond of the nation was dissolved. Reasonable remonstrances rarely produce results with an excited mob, once disorder prevails; and one knows what hard measures the divine lawgiver had to decide upon in order to restore the rebellious rabble to obedience." See *JubA*, 8:186 [Arkush, *Jerusalem*, 120].

79. Ibn Ezra, as reformulated by Ibn Melekh.

80. Ibn Ezra.

81. Rashi. The biblical phrase was absent a verb, prompting the clarification.

all the children of Levi [*ḳol bene levi*]: from this we learn that the entire tribe was without fault.[82]

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27 He said to them, "Thus has the Eternal, the God of Yisrael, spoken: everyone put his sword to his hip; go back and forth from gate to gate in the camp, and slay, some his brother, some his friend, and some his relatives."

28 The sons of Levi did as Mosheh had spoken; on the same day there fell from the people thereabouts three thousand men.

Commentary

27. **thus has the Eternal, the God of Yisrael, spoken** [*ḳoh amar adonai elohe yisraʾel*]: contra the thoughts of the calf-worshippers.[83] When did He say this?[84]—*whoever sacrifices to other divine beings shall lose his life* °(Ex. 22:19); this is taught in Mekhilta.[85] But Ramban wrote that from the perspective of the law they were not liable for death for they had not been forewarned;[86] however, this was an ad hoc measure, with which Moses was charged for that moment from the mouth of the Almighty. It was not issued as a written command, and as such, it was like another command: [*Moses said:*] *this is what the Eternal commanded, let a full omer of it* °(Ex. 16:32);[87] and there are other similar commands.

everyone put his sword to his hip [*simu ish ḥarbo ʿal yerekho*]: those who worshipped the calf were so numerous that they could not be brought to court, and so he commanded all the Levites to gird their swords. The Levites recognized those who were killed as the idolaters °(from the words of Ramban).

some his brother, etc. [*ish et aḥiv*]: [Moses instructed the Levites that even] if he recognized one of the idolaters he was not to have compassion on him and shield

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82. Rashi, based on Yoma 66b, which stated that no members of this tribe worshipped the calf.

83. I.e., these were the words of the true deity, contrary to the notions of the idolatrous rebels; this was drawn from Ibn Ezra.

84. In its narrow sense, the question sought to identify the divine statement to which Moses referred. But the broader issue was the legal justification for the extra-judicial execution that was being commanded.

85. Rashi. The passage was actually from Yal. Sh. to Judges § 43, indicating Mekhilta as its source.

86. Ramban referred to the rabbinic notions of judicial procedure (*din hatraʾah*), wherein an individual could only be convicted if he had been explicitly forewarned against doing the proscribed deed immediately before committing the act.

87. There too, the text presupposed an otherwise unrecorded oral command.

him—even if he was his brother, friend, or relative.[88] This was [referred to in the subsequent blessing of the Levites] *who said of his father and mother, I saw him not, who did not recognize his brothers, did not know his sons* °(Deut. 33:9).[89]

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29 For Mosheh had said, "take up, with this, your position for the service of the Eternal, as some must even be against his son and against his brother; you thereby also bring a blessing upon yourselves today."

Commentary

29. **take up** [*mil'u yedkhem*]: [the meaning of *mil'u* is] akin to *for they truly followed* [*mil'u aḥare*] *the Eternal* °(Num. 32:12) [although the verb there] is in the past tense. [Moses was saying as follows:] Consecrate your hands today with a sacrifice to the Eternal °(this is the correct version in the Rashbam manuscript)[90] for in [acting] **some against his son and against his brother**, you have extended your hands against heaven °(Rashbam).[91] This also accords with the translation of Onqelos and Jonathan ben Uzziel. According to this, the interpretation of **you thereby also bring a blessing upon yourselves today** is that by means of the sacrifice that you will bring as expiation for shedding the blood of sons and brothers, a blessing will be granted you, as Jonathan b. Uzziel translated. But according to the opinion of Rashi and Ibn Ezra, the meaning of **Mosheh said** is that he had already said this before the killing; there are many instances like this.[92] They read: **take up, with this, your position for the service of the Eternal**—you, who are killing the others, will with this deed consecrate yourselves as priests to the divine Presence, **as some** among you will take up his hand **against his son and against his brother**.[93] The reward will be that they receive a blessing, and this is referred to in the verse *At the same time the Eternal separated the tribe of Levi*, etc.°(Deut. 10:8);[94] it is translated thus in the German.

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30 On the next morning, Mosheh spoke to the people: "You have committed a great sin; I will now go up to the Eternal, perhaps I can obtain forgiveness for your sin."

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88. Ramban.

89. This point was made by Rashi in his commentary on the verse in Deuteronomy.

90. Mendelssohn was correcting an error in the Berlin 1705 Pentateuch.

91. Rashbam's comment was unclear and lent itself to different readings (cf. Hizkuni); Mendelssohn understood Rashbam to be saying that with the killing of those deemed guilty, the Levites would be in need of sacrificial expiation.

92. The words *va-yo'mer mosheh*, usually rendered in the past perfect tense, was here to be interpreted in the pluperfect sense.

93. Rashi.

94. Ibn Ezra.

Commentary

30. **I can obtain forgiveness for your sin** [*akhapperah be-ʿad ḥaṭṭaʾtkhem*]: I shall effect an effacement and obliteration, and [place] a barrier against your sins, to create a separation between you and the sin; these are the words of Rashi. In his commentary on Genesis °(32:21) Rashi noted that whenever the word *kapparah* is used with the word *ʿavon* [transgression] and *ḥeṭ* [sin] and with the word *panim* [anger],[95] it is always an expression of obliteration or removal. In this instance, Rashi added the connotation of "barrier" in order to explain the word *be-ʿad*, for in his opinion *be-ʿad* means "in front of," as he wrote in his commentary on Genesis °(7:16). According to the opinion of Radaq in his *Sefer ha-Shorashim*, s.v. *khaf–peh–resh*, the phrase "expiation of transgression [*kapparat ha-ʿavon*]" means the removal of the transgression, and the sense of **perhaps I can obtain forgiveness for your sin** is that "I will remove your sins by praying on account of them," or "I will remove the anger of the divine Presence, who was angry with you on account of your sins." The meaning of the word *kapparah* was already explained in the commentary on Genesis °(32:21).[96]

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31 He returned to the Eternal and said: "Alas! The people have committed a great sin! They made for themselves gods of gold."

32 "If only you would bear their sin well! But if not, then blot me out of the book that you have written."

33 The Eternal said to Mosheh: "whoever sinned against me, that one I will blot out of My book."

Commentary

32. **if only you would bear their sin well** [*im tissa ḥaṭṭaʾtam*]: then well and good—I will not say to you: blot me out. **But if not, then blot me out**. This is an elliptical verse, and there are many like this. This is the interpretation of Rashi. Note that even the German vernacular uses the word "if" when one wants to say "would that" °(*wenn doch!*), and thus the German translator rendered it in a manner that made it unnecessary to call this an elliptical verse.

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95. Reading *panim*, which generally meant face, in accordance with Onqelos' translation of Gen. 32:21. See the *Beʾur* to Ex. 33:14.

96. In a note appended to Dubno's commentary, Mendelssohn cited Wessely to the effect that the various permutations of this word all connoted covering or protection.

out of the book [*mi-sifrekha*]: the book of life **that you have written** [*asher kat-avta*]: as in *all who are inscribed for life* [*ha-katuv la-ḥayyim*] *in Jerusalem* °(Isa. 4:3). According to its *peshaṭ*, the meaning is "if you don't bear their sin, *then I would rather die than live*" (Jonah 4:3).[97]

33. **I will blot out of My book** [*emḥennu mi-sifri*]: and not you, who did not sin against me.[98]

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34 "So, go forth, lead the people to where I told you—My angel shall move before you; when I will afflict you, I will also visit this sin."

Commentary

34. **I told you** [*dibbarti lakh*]: [the verb] *dibbur* is followed by *lakh* instead of *elekha*,[99] and the same is the case in *to speak to him* [*le-dabber lo*] *on behalf of Adoniyahu* °(1 Kgs. 2:19); these are the words of Rashi. According to what we wrote earlier in Genesis °(24:7), this is not an exception to the general rule Rashi noted there,[100] for the phrase **to where I told you** is the same as "to the land" or "the place that I told you," just as [the phrase here] was translated by Onqelos and Jonathan ben Uzziel as "to the place that I told you." The place functions as the object of the verb, and when the verb *dibbur* is accompanied by the object of which it is speaking, then it is accompanied with the pronoun *lo* or *lahem*, and not with *elai* or *elav*. However, [the verse] *to speak to him on behalf of Adoniyahu* is surely an exception to that rule, for there is no object mentioned there at all.

The meaning [of our verse] is as Ramban wrote: "God said to him: 'Now that I have altered My decree to do away with them, lead them **to where I told you**, *to the place of the Kenaʿani*, etc. (Ex. 3:8).' However, he did not want to note this [explicitly], for this was said in anger, as if saying 'that which I said, I will do in your honor °(it may be that Scripture hinted at this with the word *lakh*, that

97. Rashbam; Mendelssohn, however, substituted the verse in Jonah for Rashbam's citation of Num. 11:15.

98. Ramban.

99. The words *lakh* and *elekha*, both of which broadly mean "to you," are prepositions with pronominal suffixes.

100. Rashi explained that when a pronominal preposition formed from *lamed* was used with the verb *dibbur*, it meant "concerning" or "with regards to"; but when *dibbur* was followed by *elai* or *elav*, it meant "to speak with me (or: him)." Ramban disputed the validity of this philological distinction, and the *Beʾur* to Gen. 24:7 cited both views but offered Mendelssohn's defense of Rashi based on the distinction between *dibbur* as a transitive verb with a direct object, and as an intransitive verb. The *Beʾur* also cited the German distinction between *sagen* (or *anzeigen*) and *reden*.

is, for your sake and for your honor, and for this reason it did not use the word *elekha*)[101] but I will not bear their sin entirely.'"[102]

My angel [*hinneh mal'akhi*]: but not I.[103] I will not rest my divine Presence in their midst,[104] for they have yet to be commanded regarding the construction of the Tabernacle, as is indicated above.[105]

when I will afflict you, etc. [*u-ve-yom poqdi*]: forever and ever—when I take an accounting of their iniquities, I will account a little of this sin along with other sins; all afflictions suffered by Israel will include partial payment for the sin of the calf °(Rashi).

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35 The Eternal sent a plague among the people; because they had made the calf, which Aharon had to make.

Commentary

35. **The Eternal sent a plague among the people** [*va-yiggof adonai et ha-'am*]: they died before their time, as in *the Eternal will strike him down, or his day will come* °(1 Sam. 26:10).[106]

because they had made the calf [*'al asher 'asu et ha-'egel*]: Onqelos translated this "because they worshipped the calf," by which he meant, as Ramban explained, that those who sacrificed and bowed down to it were the ones who died by the Levites' sword, while those who embraced and kissed and were pleased with it were the ones who died in the plague. This is akin to what the Sages said in Yoma °(66b):[107] "It was related about Rav and Levi [who had a dispute in this matter]. One said: he who sacrificed and burned incense [to the calf] died by the sword; whoever embraced and kissed [it], died [by plague]; whoever rejoiced in

101. Cf. the *Be'ur* to Gen. 12:1, s.v. *lekh lekha*.

102. Although Ramban's explanation is cited with only very minor changes, Mendelssohn added the word "entirely" and omitted the last few lines of Ramban's comments, since they overlap with the comment cited from Rashi below.

103. Rashi.

104. Ramban suggested this in his comment on v. 35.

105. Mendelssohn was referring here to his *Be'ur* to Ex. 31:18 where he applied the notion that the scriptural narrative was not always organized along chronological lines (see n. 51), and adopted Rashi's view that the episode of the golden calf preceded the divine instructions pertaining to the construction of the Tabernacle in ch. 25–31.

106. Ramban.

107. Ramban had cited this rabbinic passage earlier in his comment on v. 27.

his heart died of *hydrokan*.[108] The other said: [He whose worship of the calf was observed by] witnesses and [had been] forewarned[109] died by the sword; whoever had witnesses but no forewarning, died [by the plague]; and he who had no witnesses and no forewarning, died of *hydrokan*." But according to what we wrote above in the name of Ramban that all this occurred as an ad hoc measure,[110] the phrase **because they had made the calf** can be restated as "[because] they gathered around Aaron and brought him the gold and forced him to make a molten image."[111] The One who *probes the mind* (Ps. 7:10) knew their thoughts, and He afflicted whoever sinned against Him in thought, as He had said *whoever sinned against me, that one I will blot out from My book* (v. 33). This is how it is translated in German.

108. In rabbinic literature, *hydrokan* was a symptomatic description of swelling of the internal organs.

109. See above, n. 86.

110. In other words, the punishments were meted out in response to the crisis at hand, and not de jure. See the *Be'ur* to v. 27 above.

111. Mendelssohn sharpened Ramban's formulation, insisting that the blame rested with those who worshipped the calf, and not Aaron who made it.

Exodus 33

33:1 The Eternal spoke to Mosheh, "Depart from here and go up, you and the people that you led up out of Miṣrayim; to the land that I swore to Avraham, Yiṣhaq, and Yaaqov, and said, 'I will give it to your seed.'"

Commentary

1. **The Eternal spoke to Mosheh** [*va-yedabber adonai el mosheh*]: the verse here used the word for speaking [*dibbur*] without the word for saying [*amirah*] to indicate that the time of [God's] wrath had not yet passed. This is confirmed by God's saying **the people that you led up**, instead of "and My people" or "the children of Israel."[1]

depart from here and go up [*leḳh ʿaleh mi-zeh*]: one going to the land of Israel is referred to as going up.

to the land that I swore, etc. [*el ha-ʾaretz asher nishbaʿti*]: after the plague God was slightly appeased, enough to mention the merit of their forefathers, and the oath that He swore to them.[2]

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2 "I will send an angel before you; and through him I will drive away the Kenaani, Emori, Ḥitti, Perizi, Ḥivi, and Yevusi people."

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1. In the *Beʾur* to Ex. 32:7, Mendelssohn pointed out that the common biblical formulation was "And the Lord spoke . . . saying," and he followed Rashi in suggesting that the word *dibbur* without *amirah* indicated harsh or angry speech. But in this instance, Mendelssohn applied that exegetical nuance contra Rashi, who read our verse as a softening of the harsh language and a sign of God's abating anger.

2. Ramban.

3 "To the land, where milk and honey flow; for my Presence itself shall not remain with you, since you are an obstinate people, lest I destroy you on the way."

Commentary

3. **to the land where milk and honey flow** [*el ereṣ zavat ḥalav u-devash*]: this refers back to the [first] verse, [such that the text should read] **depart from here and go up to the land that I swore**, etc., **to the land where milk and honey flow**.[3]

for my Presence itself shall not remain with you [*lo eʿeleh be-qirbekha*]: a Tabernacle will not be built, for I will not dwell in the midst of the children of Israel,[4] therefore I will send an angel before you. Onqelos translated this as "for I will not remove my divine Presence from your midst," rendering it as a beneficial promise for Israel.

since you are an obstinate people [*ki ʿam qesheh ʿoref attah*]: when I dwell in your midst and you rebel against me, I will increase My wrath against you.[5]

I destroy you [*akhelkha*]: this means annihilation.[6] The letter *khaf* is vocalized with a small *pataḥ* ˚(that is, a *segol*) instead of a *pataḥ*, and the *lamed* lacks a *dagesh* even though this should be its proper vocalization,[7] as in *I will hold forth* (*aḥavkha*), *listen to me* ˚(Job 15:17).[8]

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4 When the people heard this grave report they grieved; and no one put on his jewelry.

5 For the Eternal had said to Mosheh, "Say to the children of Yisrael: you are an obstinate people—if I remained with you only an instant, then I would destroy you; so remove your jewelry, meanwhile I will know well what I will do to you."

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3. Rashi, as articulated by Mizrahi.

4. Ibn Ezra.

5. Rashi; most versions of Rashi had "when my divine presence is in your midst," but the Berlin 1705 Bible could be read "when I dwell. . . ."

6. Rashi.

7. With the dagesh forte and the doubling (germination) of the *lamed*, the word would have been vocalized *akhallekha*.

8. Ibn Ezra.

6 So the children of Yisrael removed their jewelry, from the time they were at the mountain Ḥorev.

Commentary

4. **this grave [report]** [*ha-raʿ ha-zeh*]: [this refers to the statement] that the divine Presence will not rest [among them] or go with them °(Rashi). Ibn Ezra interpreted it as referring to the next verse, **for the Eternal had said to Mosheh**, etc., similar to *since the Eternal also said to Moses in Midian* °(Ex. 4:19).[9]

jewelry [*ʿedyo*]: Onqelos translated this as "his array of armaments" and Jonathan ben Uzziel added "[array of armaments] that had been given to them on Sinai and on which the great and holy name was clearly engraved." This is from Genesis Rabbah.[10] Ibn Ezra and Rashbam interpreted this as beautiful clothing and jewelry, [which they removed when] they observed the mourning customs on account of the calf.

5. **I would destroy you** [*ve-khillitikha*]: it is thus good for you that I send an angel before you.[11]

so remove your jewelry [*ve-ʿattah hored ʿedyekha me-ʿalekha*]: you will suffer this punishment immediately, that you will remove your jewelry from yourselves.[12]

meanwhile I will know well what I will do to you [*ve-ʾedeʿah mah eʿeseh lakh*]: in the affliction for the remainder of the transgression,[13] I know what is in My heart to do to you.[14]

6. **their jewelry, from the time they were at the mountain Ḥorev** [*et ʿedyam me-har ḥorev*]: the jewelry that they had in their possession since the day they stood at the mountain of Horev.[15]

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9. In his commentary on Ex. 4:19, Ibn Ezra noted that the previous verse included the response to the action dictated in v. 19; here too, Ibn Ezra suggested that our verse described the response to the statement of v. 5.

10. Mendelssohn, following Ramban, gave the wrong reference. The source was Exod. R. 45:2–3, which spoke of weapons divinely given to the people to protect them from harm.

11. Rashi.

12. Ibid.

13. I.e., that which has been left unpunished.

14. Rashi.

15. Ibid. The comment sought to avoid a misreading, namely that the Israelites removed their jewelry at the time of revelation and had not worn them since. The correct reading, offered here, was that they now removed the jewelry that they had worn since Sinai.

7 Mosheh however took the tent, pitched it outside of the camp, far away from the camp, and called it the Designated-Tent;[16] one who asked for instruction from the Eternal had to go out to the Designated-Tent, which was outside the camp.

8 When Mosheh went out to the tent, the entire people rose, [and] every one remained standing at the doorway of his tent; and so they looked at Mosheh, until he had gone into the tent.

9 As soon as Mosheh went in to the tent, the cloud-column came down, [and] stood in the doorway of the tent; and the Presence conversed with Mosheh.

10 When the entire people now saw the cloud-column standing at the doorway of the tent, they rose up, and everyone prostrated himself before the doorway of his tent to worship.

Commentary

7. **Mosheh** [*u-mosheh*]: from [the time of] that transgression onward.[17]

took the tent [*yiqqaḥ et ha-ʾohel*]: this is [actually] in the present tense—he would take his tent and pitch it outside the camp, saying: "one who is ostracized by the master is also ostracized by the disciple."[18] It is possible that if the tent stood within the camp Moses would not receive the divine word from there, for God did not want to rest his divine Presence in their midst.[19]

and called it the Designated-Tent [*ve-qara lo ohel moʿed*]: he called his tent a **Designated-Tent** [*ohel moʿed*] because God designated it [*noʿad lo*] there until the Tabernacle was built.[20]

8. **When Mosheh went out** [*ḳe-ṣeʾt mosheh*]: from the camp to go to the tent.[21]

16. *Stiftszelt*. See the *Beʾur*. See also the *Beʾur* to Ex. 25:22 and 29:43, where Mendelssohn explained that the word *moʿed* referred to a time or place set aside for a designated purpose.

17. Rashi.

18. Ibid. The notion that "one who is ostracized by the master is also ostracized by the disciple" is a rabbinic statement that is linked to our verse in Exod. R. 45:3.

19. Ramban, but also implicit in Ibn Ezra.

20. Ibn Ezra.

21. Rashi.

rose [*yaqumu*]: they always did this, or usually did so, as in *this is what Job used to do* °(Job 1:5).[22]

9. **conversed with Mosheh** [*ve-dibber ʿim mosheh*]: [the meaning of this is] the same as *u-middabber* with Mosheh[23] [and] its Aramaic translation *u-mitmallel*,[24] [rendered as such] out of respect for the divine Presence. Similarly, one reads *he heard the voice* [of God] *conversing with him* [*middabber elav*] °(Num. 7:89) and not *medabber elav*. When one reads *middabber* [i.e., in the reflexive form], the meaning is that the [divine] voice is speaking to itself and the ordinary individual overhears on his own, but when one reads it as *medabber*, it suggests the king is speaking [directly] with the commoner °(Rashi). See what is written with regard to this in Numbers °(loc. cit.).[25]

10. **prostrated** [*ve-hishtaḥavvu*]: to the divine Presence.

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11 The Eternal conversed with Mosheh, face to face, as a person converses with his friend; then Mosheh turned and returned to the camp, but his servant Yehoshua the son of Nun, who served him as a youth, never removed himself from the tent.

Commentary

11. **The Eternal conversed with Mosheh** [*ve-dibber adonai el mosheh*]: And [God] conversed [*u-mitmallel*] with Moses °(Rashi). [However,] in our translation of Onqelos, the text reads "and God spoke [*u-mallel*] with Moses," while Jonathan ben Uzziel translated it as *u-mitmallel*.[26]

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22. The verb in our verse and Job 1:5 is in the future tense. In his commentary on Job, Rashi pointed out that in describing an ongoing action, the Bible employed either past or future tenses, and Mendelssohn adapted the point to the verse here.

23. The word *dibber* was nominally in the past tense. Most scholars (see, for example, Mizrahi) read Rashi as saying that the word *dibber* was the present tense of the *piʿel* form (*medabber*), as opposed to Onqelos who rendered the word in the reflexive case. Mendelssohn read Rashi differently. He vocalized the word as *middabber*, a reflexive participle, and understood Rashi to be making the same point as Onqelos.

24. *mitmallel* is in the reflexive form. Both words mean "speaking (or talking) to oneself," as Mendelssohn went on to explain.

25. The *Beʾur* to Num. 7:89 explained the difference between the *piʿel* and *hitpaʿel* (reflexive) forms with regard to the verb "to speak." While the former was used whenever speech was produced through the physical organs of speech, divine speech, which was "created" without any natural means, was more appropriately described with the reflexive form, in which the predicate and object were one and the same. The point was to differentiate between divine and human speech. Such sensitivity to biblical anthropomorphism was evident throughout Onqelos' translation, though much less so in Rashi's commentary.

26. See the *Beʾur* to v. 9 above.

face to face [*panim el panim*]: this does not contradict what God says below °(in v. 23) *my Countenance cannot be seen*, for the meaning here is that [divine speech] came to him in an awakened state and in a clear vision—not in *a dream, a night vision* (Job 33:14) or in a parable or riddles, but rather *very clearly* (Deut. 27:8) **as a person converses with his friend—face to face**, *mouth to mouth* (Num. 12:8).[27] Likewise, in another place Moses said to all the Israelites, *Face to face the Eternal has spoken with you* °(Deut. 5:4), and there too the intended meaning is not that they saw the visible face, as is explained.[28]

then Mosheh turned and returned to the camp [*ve-shav el ha-maḥaneh*]: after [God] had conversed with him, Moses would return to the camp and instruct the elders regarding what he learned.[29]

but his servant Yehoshua the son of Nun who served him as a youth [*u-meshareto yehoshuaʿ bin nun naʿar*]: Ibn Ezra explained that this meant that his servant [Joshua] provided him the service of a young man [*naʿar*], since Joshua was already a grown man and Scripture could not refer to him as a youth.[30] Ramban wrote that "it was the manner of Hebrew to call any attendant *naʿar*; for the individual in the honored position of authority is referred to as 'the man,' and the one who serves him is called *naʿar*, and so it is with *his servant Gehazi* °(2 Kgs. 4:12, 25) and *Let the young men rise* °(2 Sam. 2:14)." According to his explanation, the word *naʿar* is an adjective that functions like a present participle, and the meaning [of our verse] is that his servant Joshua was constantly serving or attending [upon Moses] such that he **never removed himself from the tent**. But this explanation is forced, and it would appear that the phrase means "he served Moses from his youth," [i.e.,] that he began to serve him while still a youth.

son of Nun [*bin nun*]: the vowel *ḥiriq* comes in the place of the *segol*, and likewise *the words of Agur son of* [*bin*] *Jakeh* °(Prov. 30:1), or *which appeared overnight* [*bin laylah . . .*] *and perished overnight* [*u-vin laylah . . .*] °(Jon. 4:10).[31]

Now, once Scripture began to talk about the tent that Moses pitched for himself far away from the camp, it finished relating all that occurred while the tent remained there until the Tabernacle was erected, which continued until the first

27. Cf. Maimonides' description of the distinctive quality of Mosaic prophecy in his commentary on M. San. 10:1 (introduction), and *Mishneh Torah*, Yesode ha-Torah 7:6.

28. The *Beʾur* to Deut. 5:4 cited Ibn Ezra verbatim: "*face to face*—that is, without an intermediary. The meaning is that when someone makes his voice heard to another [it is called] face to face, even if it [= the face] cannot be seen."

29. Rashi.

30. Ibn Ezra ascertained that Joshua was 56 years old at this juncture, hence his effort to explain that calling him "a youth" was a function of the service he provided Moses.

31. Ramban.

day of [the month of] Nissan, according to the opinion of the Sages.[32] And once it was erected, God did not converse with him from Moses' tent again, but from the *ohel moʿed*[33] *from between the cherubim* (Ex. 25:22). Scripture now returned to relate what happened on the 19th of Tammuz, when Moses ascended the mountain [a second time].

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12 Mosheh said to the Eternal: "Behold! You say to me 'Lead this people up,' but you have not made known to me what kind of a messenger you will send with me; and yet you have said 'I have singled you out by name, and you have also found favor with me.'"

Commentary

12. **Behold! you say to me** [*reʾeh attah omer elai*]: set your eyes and your mind to your words.[34]

you will send with me [*et asher tishlaḥ ʿimmi*]: [meaning] whom you will send with me, whether it is the earlier angel to which Scripture referred, *My Name is in him* °(Ex. 23:21) °(Ibn Ezra and Ramban).[35]

you have not made known to me, etc., **you have said** [*ve-ʾattah lo hodaʿtani . . . ve-ʾattah amarta*]: he repeated the personal pronoun as an indicator of the contrary nature and apparent contradiction in these words.

I have singled you out [*yedaʿtikha*]: I distinguished you from other individuals with distinct importance, for you said to me *I will reveal Myself to you in a thick cloud . . . so they will also always believe in you* °(Ex. 19:9) °(Rashi).

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13 "If I have now found favor with you, then make your ways known to me so that I know you, so that I can find further favor with you; consider that this people is your nation!"

Commentary

13. **now** [*ve-ʿattah*]: if it is true that I have found favor in your eyes.[36]

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32. Ramban from his commentary on v. 7. Note that Mendelssohn extracted this point from Ramban's broader critique of the notion of *en muqdam u-meʾuḥar ba-torah*; see above, *Beʾur* to Ex. 32:13, n. 51.

33. Rashi.

34. Ibid.

35. The source for Ibn Ezra is his commentary on v. 21.

36. Rashi.

then make your ways known to me [*hodiʿeni na et derakhekha*]: the ways of your beneficence and mercy with which you act toward your creatures—how we should approach your Presence to appease you in a time of anger.

so that I know you [*ve-ʾedaʿakha*]: through the knowledge of your ways and the attributes of your governance.

so that I can find further favor with you [*lemaʿan emṣa ḥen be-ʿenekha*]: *with honesty and sincerity* (Judg. 9:16) at a time of need, in order to arouse [your] will when the divine Countenance is hidden.[37] By these means you will be able to remain in our midst and not destroy us on the way, as you had said [in vv. 3, 5]; if you will be angry with us, we will know how to avert your wrath.[38]

consider, etc. [*u-reʾeh*]: remember that this people on whose behalf I pray is your *people and your own possession* (Deut. 9:26) whom you chose *to be your own people* (Deut. 4:20); so now, *do not cast them out of your Presence* (Ps. 51:13) and do not abandon them to the hand of another.

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14 The Eternal[39] said: "My anger will subside, and I will accede to you."

15 The former said: "As long as your anger does not subside, let us not depart from this place."[40]

16 "For how can it be known that I and your nation have found favor in your eyes? Is it not when you go with us? Only then shall we be distinguished, I and your nation, from every other nation on the face of the earth."

Commentary

14. **The Eternal said: My anger will subside** [*va-yoʾmar panai yelekhu*]: the word *panim* [lit.: face] is used with reference to anger, as in *she no longer had her an-*

37. I.e., to call upon divine Providence at a time when God seems to have turned away.

38. This alludes to Deut. 9:8, where Moses recounted the incident of the golden calf.

39. Vv.14 and 15 begin with "and he said"; Mendelssohn inserted the antecedents for clarity.

40. Vv. 15–19, 23, and 34:6–7 were also translated in *Jerusalem*; see *JubA*, 8:187–88. The translation there was somewhat different: since his purpose in citing these verses in *Jerusalem* was to illustrate Scripture's spirit of forgiveness and compassion, he felt free to paraphrase and embellish the translation.

ger [*paneha*] °(1 Sam. 1:18).[41] The intended meaning is as Jonathan ben Uzziel translated,[42] "wait until my face of anger passes and afterwards I will give you respite" to fulfill your request, namely, that I myself will go with you.

15. **as long as your anger does not subside** [*im en panekha holekhim*]: as long as your face of wrath has not passed.

let us not depart from this place [*al taʿalenu mi-zeh*]: it is better for us to remain here until your fury subsides, rather than to leave by means of an intermediary.

16. **for how**, etc. [*u-va-meh*]: this nation's sin was widely known, and they were also punished in a highly public way. Now, when your anger and rage against the nation abates and you accept them, it is proper that the reconciliation should be made known in an open and public manner. [But] **how can** this **be known**? Only when you **go with us**—by this advantage alone will the nations know that we **have found favor in your eyes**. By these means we will be distinguished and superior and set apart **from every other nation on the face of the earth**.[43]

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17 The Eternal said to Mosheh, "this too, what you have said, I will do. For you have found favor in My eyes, and I have singled you out by name."

18 Mosheh[44] then said: "Let me behold your Glory!"

Commentary

17. **this too**, etc. [*gam et ha-davar ha-zeh*]: you will not depart from this place until after I have reconciled Myself to you, to rest my divine Presence in your midst.

18. **let me behold your Glory!** [*harʾeni na et kevodekha*]: Moses saw that it was a propitious moment before Him, and [so] he added another request, that He

41. See Rashi to 1 Sam. 1:18. Ibn Ezra had cited but rejected the reading of *panim* as anger; Mendelssohn's immediate source appeared to be Abarbanel, citing *Guide* I:37. Cf. the *Beʾur* to Ex. 32:30.

42. Mendelssohn rendered Jonathan ben Uzziel's comment in Hebrew; the same reading also appeared in Ber. 7a.

43. Although this comment was partly drawn from Rashi, Mendelssohn ignored his emphasis (based on Ber. 7a) on Moses' entreaty that God not rest His presence on other nations. Mendelssohn was more comfortable ascribing a special relationship to God and the Israelites than denying God's relationship with other nations. Mendelssohn also emphasized Moses' request for the public affirmation of that special relationship.

44. Here and in vv. 19–20, Mendelssohn inserted or clarified the otherwise ambiguous antecedents.

show him His Glory through a clear lens.[45] [Moses] would thus know His ways; just as a person sees the face of his friend and recognizes his ways and qualities from his countenance—his moment of anger and conciliation, of being judgmental and benevolent—in this way he sought to know, by means of seeing a substantial vision of the Glory,[46] the ways of God and the attributes of his governance with regard to his creatures at all times. The main object of Moses' request, according to the profound sense of the scriptural *peshaṭ*, was to benefit the nation, with whose governance he was preoccupied. He wanted to know, at a [future] time of need, [how to recognize] whether or not it was a propitious time before Him, and how to appeal to His mercy and munificence at a *momentary anger and slight wrath* (Ps. 30:6, Isa. 54:8) when His sons have sinned against Him.[47]

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19 The former said: "I will let all My goodness pass before you, and with the name of the Eternal I will call out before you; how I am gracious to whom I am gracious, and am merciful to whom I am merciful."

20 The Eternal went on, "you cannot behold my Countenance; no man can behold Me and remain alive."

Commentary

19. **I will let all My goodness pass before you** [*ani aʿavir kol ṭuvi ʿal panekha*]: you will comprehend and understand the attribute of My goodness more than any man, and in reference to this it is written [regarding Moses] *he is a faithful steward in My entire house* °(Num. 12:7) for a man's precious possession is his home.[48]

and with the name of the Eternal I will call out before you [*ve-qaraʾti ve-shem adonai le-fanekha*]: I will call out before you with the Great Name, and I will declare My attributes; and by that call and declaration of attributes you will know and grasp the ways of compassion and mercy, that whomever I want to grace will be graced with my Name, and will be shown mercy with My vast goodness when I see fit to be merciful.[49]

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45. Up to this point Mendelssohn's comment was based on Rashi, although the reference to the "clear lens (*ispaqlarya ha-meʾirah*)" was from Ramban.

46. This last clause was also taken from Ramban.

47. The political emphasis here was drawn from *Guide* I:54.

48. Ramban, drawing closely upon *Guide* I:54.

49. This comment incorporated elements of Rashi and Ramban.

20. **the Eternal went on, "you cannot. . ."** [*va-yoʾmer lo tukhal*]: [with regard to] your request to behold my Countenance in a substantial vision—you cannot behold it while you are still living.

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21 The Eternal said further, "here is a place near Me; you can stand there on the rock."

Commentary

21. **here is a place near Me** [*hinneh maqom itti*]: On the mountain where I always speak with you, there is a place prepared for your sake where I will conceal you so that you will not be harmed, and from there you will see what you may. This is the *peshaṭ* of the verse. Its midrashic explanation[50] is that this is a reference to a *maqom*[51] wherein the divine Presence speaks; the verse says **a place near Me** and not "a place where I am," for the Holy One, Blessed be He, is the [dwelling] place of the world, and not that the world is His [dwelling] place °(Rashi). [The notion of] *maqom* denotes an entity in which a thing finds its subsistence and enduring existence. God, who sustains all other existing things with the utterance of His mouth, that being the expression of His will and desire, is thus the place of the world.[52]

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22 "When my Glory will pass, I will put you in the cave of the rock; and My hand will cover you °(that is, I will take you into My all-powerful protection, and prevent you from beholding the Countenance) until my Glory will be past."

Commentary

22. **my Glory will pass** [*ba-ʿavor kevodi*]: When I will let all My goodness pass before you.[53]

the cave of the rock [*be-niqrat ha-ṣur*]: [This is to be interpreted] as per Onqelos, "in a cave of the rock." [The word *niqrah* is] from the root [*nun-kuf-resh*, as in]

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50. Gen. R. 68:9, with other midrashic parallels.

51. "Place," or "space."

52. Mendelssohn's philosophical gloss on the rabbinic phrase that God is "the place of the world (*meqomo shel ʿolam*)" seemed to have two late medieval sources: Hasdai Crescas, *Or Adonai* (Ferrara, 1555), treatise I, principle 2, ch. 1; and especially Isaac Arama, *ʿAqedat Yiṣḥaq*, ch. 34. Our thanks to Bernard Septimus for these references.

53. Rashi commented simply "when I pass before you"; Mendelssohn's insertion of "all My goodness" pointed the reader back to v. 19 and his philosophical explication.

should you put out [*tenaqqer*] *those men's eyes* °(Num. 16:14), *the ravens of the brook will gouge it out* [*yiqqeruha*] °(Prov. 30:17), *I dug* [*qarti*] *and drank the waters* °(2 Kgs. 19:24, Isa. 37:25); they all connote digging.[54]

My hand will cover you [*ve-sakkoti khappi*]: Onqelos translated this as "I will protect you with My utterance," employing a phrase that refers to the Divine in a reverential manner, since He does not need to cover him with an actual hand.[55] Rather, [God protects Moses] with an utterance of His mouth, which is to say, [His] will.[56] The hand serves as a kind of cover, like a man who conceals the body of the sun with his hand[57] so that he cannot see it and be harmed by its brightness; likewise, [says God,] I will conceal Myself on your behalf so that you are not destroyed by gazing upon something not permitted to you.

until my Glory will be past [*ʿad ʿovri*]: until I remove the guidance of my Glory from before your face, to go from there onward.[58]

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23 "When I take My hand from you °(that is, allow you to see) you will behold my Presence from behind; my Countenance, however, cannot be seen."

Commentary

23. **when I take My hand from you** [*ve-hasiroti et kappi*]: after I pass before you, when you would no longer be able to visually behold my Countenance, then I will remove my hand from upon you, as it is translated by Onqelos, "when I will remove the guidance of my Glory." I will no longer conceal you with the cover of my hand, in order that you can look **from behind**, for **my Countenance cannot be seen**. The meaning of [the expression] "seeing God from behind" is the apprehension of God's ways from the aspect of His exalted deeds, for this is the ultimate of what is possible for a created being to apprehend from the substance of His Glory, may He be blessed. Moses our teacher apprehended of Him more than any man. There was no one before him—and there will not be one after him—who reached his noble excellence in the apprehension of God

54. Rashi, with editing.

55. Rashi. As in other instances (see, e.g., Ex. 19:4) Mendelssohn read Rashi as exegetically sensitive to the implications of God's corporeality.

56. See *Guide* I:65.

57. This half-sentence is from Ibn Ezra.

58. Rashi to v. 23.

and the knowledge of the ways and attributes with which He governs the things created.[59]

[The meaning of the expression] "beholding the divine Countenance (*re'iyat ha-panim*)" is the apprehension of God and the knowledge of His ways from the aspect of his Essence, something that is impossible for any created being. For an essence is substantiated through its apprehension, and that which is apprehended from the aspect of its essence is not more sublime than the one who apprehends it; therefore, only God Himself apprehends the divine Essence from the aspect of that Essence itself. We have already spoken about this [in the Commentary] above °(Ex. 3:15).[60]

59. See *Guide* I:21, 37–38.

60. The notion of the incomparability of God's self-apprehension appears to be based upon Maimonides' *Mishneh Torah*, Yesode ha-Torah 2:8. Man's inability to know God and understand Him is central to Mendelssohn's argument for the limits of human knowledge, a theme that pervaded his writings. In particular he objected to the "arrogance of philosophy" and its claims to absolute knowledge. See, for example, *Philosophische Gespräche*, *JubA,* 1:22–25 and *Abhandlung über die Evidenz in Metaphysischen Wissenschaften*, *JubA,* 2:296–97. See also the *Be'ur* to Ex. 14:1.

Exodus 34

34:1 The Eternal spoke to Mosheh, "hew two stone tablets like the first ones; I will write on the tablets the words that were on those [first] tablets that you have broken."

Commentary

1. **hew** [*pesol lekha*]: you broke the first [tablets]—[now] you hew others [in their place].[1]

like the first ones [*ka-ri'shonim*]: according to the same measurements.[2]

on the tablets [*'al ha-luḥot*]: the text repeats the noun instead of using a pronoun, for such is the clarity of the language.[3]

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2 "Be done with it by morning; that is, you should go up Mount Sinai in the morning, and wait for Me there at the peak of the mountain."

3 "No one shall go up with you, and no one should be seen on the entire mountain; so too, the small livestock and the cattle should not graze against the mountain."

Commentary

2. **done** [*nakhon*]: he should complete his work today, and be ready tomorrow.[4]

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1. Rashi.
2. Ibn Ezra.
3. This was based on Ibn Ezra's comment on v. 4, addressing the similar repetition of the phrase "two stone tablets."
4. This expanded on Rashi's one-word comment: "ready."

wait for Me [*ve-niṣṣavta li*]: he should stand there and wait until God, the King of Kings, reveals Himself to him.

3. **no one shall go up with you** [*ve-ʾish lo yaʿaleh ʿimmakh*]: the elders are not to go up with him, as they did with [the giving of] the first tablets; [**and no one should be seen**] **on the entire mountain,** even at the foot of the mountain, where the nation had stood the first time. Likewise, the animals [**should not graze**] **against the mountain**; [they should be] at a distance, far from the Glory. With the first [tablets], they were only warned against touching [the mountain], but [God] was more stringent with the giving of these tablets than at the first assembly, for this was for Moses alone on account of his merit and his prayer, and the Glory revealed on the mountain the second time would be greater than the first.[5]

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4 Mosheh[6] hewed two stone tablets like the first, got up early in the morning, went up the mountain as the Eternal ordered him; and he took with [him] both stone tablets.

5 The Eternal lowered Himself down in a cloud [and] stood with him there; and called in the name of the Eternal.

Commentary

5. **stood** [*va-yityaṣṣev*]: some explain that it was the cloud that stood [with Moses],[7] for [in the next verse it was] God who passed by.[8] But this explanation is unnecessary; since the verse [had the verb] **lowered**, it would appear that [the verb] **stood** comes to interrupt that [action of] lowering, for [God] stood there until He passed [in front of Moses] afterwards [i.e., in the following verse].

with him [*ʿimmo*]: with Moses, who was standing there, as it was written *you can stand there on the rock* (Ex. 33:21).[9]

and called in the name of the Eternal [*va-yikra be-shem adonai*]: those who affixed the cantillation punctuated the word *be-shem* [**in the name**] with a pausal sign, indicating that in his opinion the verse was to be read as "the Eternal **called**

5. Ramban.
6. The biblical text has "and he hewed"; Mendelssohn inserted the proper name for clarity.
7. I.e., the subject of the verb was the cloud, and not God.
8. This explanation was cited by Ibn Ezra.
9. Rashbam.

in the name." However, this was not the opinion of Onqelos, who translated it as "he [= Moses] **called in the name** of the Lord," and Rashi agreed with him.

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6 That is, the Presence of the Eternal passed before Mosheh and called: "the Eternal is the immutable eternal being, an all-powerful God, all-merciful and all-gracious; forbearing, of unending kindness and faithfulness."

Commentary

6. **That is, the Presence of the Eternal passed before Mosheh** [*va-yaʿavor adonai ʿal panav*]: to fulfill what He had told him, *I will let all My goodness pass before you* (Ex. 33:19).[10] Onqelos translated this as "the Lord passed His *Shekhinah* before him."

and called [*va-yiqra*]: the *Targum Yerushalmi*[11] translated this as "Moses prayed and said," for he found it problematic to say that God [himself] called the Name. But it was written above *and with the name of the Eternal I will call out* [*qaraʾti*] *before you* (Ex. 33: 19). The correct reading according to its *peshaṭ* is that God is the one calling out, making known His ways and attributes to Moses his servant, and teaching him how He is to be called.[12] This call was mentioned in the previous verse—*and called in the name of the Eternal*—adhering to the [scriptural] pattern in which a general statement is followed by the particular[s]; that is, Scripture is now explaining how that call happened, and what He called out.

the Eternal is the immutable eternal being [*yhvh yhvh*]: the first name is the subject of the statement and the second is the predicate, as if saying "God is God." The meaning is that the sum of all that can be said of this exalted subject, and everything that can be articulated by mouth or mentally conceived regarding his Essence, is nothing other than the repetition of that very subject itself; and likewise, He said *I am that I am* [*ehyeh asher ehyeh*] (Ex. 3:14)[13] and *I, I alone am* [*ani ani hu*] (Deut. 32:39). This matter of speculation is exceedingly deep. But according to the *peshaṭ*, the meaning is: the past, present, and future Being that is available to Israel in their hour of need—He is the inalterable

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10. Ramban.

11. The Berlin 1705 Pentateuch included an Aramaic translation titled *Yerushalmi* alongside that of Jonathan b. Uzziel; see Mendelssohn's discussion in section II of *Or li-Netivah*, p. 280.

12. Ibn Ezra, with slight expansion and revision.

13. Mendelssohn translated this as "I am the Being that is eternal;" see the *Beʾur* there. The translation employed here conveys his immediate point more effectively.

and unchanging Being that will forever be available for those who call out to Him. *I, I alone am—I am* before the individual sins, and *I am* after he sins and repents.[14]

an all-powerful God [*el*]: [a God that is] powerful and prevails over everything.

all-merciful [*raḥum*]: one who feels pain and whose soul is moved by the suffering of another person is referred to as someone who shows mercy [*meraḥem*]; and if he is then stirred by this to help without expectation of recompense but only to benefit one in need of deliverance, he is referred to as someone who shows grace [*ḥonen*], for compassion is the quality of the soul that seeks to help another person for his own sake, and not for the benefit of the one giving relief.[15] Now, God alone is **all-merciful** and **all-gracious** [*ve-ḥannun*], but it cannot be said about any created being that he is all-merciful and all-gracious [*raḥum ve-ḥannun*], only that he shows mercy and grace [*meraḥem ve-ḥonen*]. Similarly, it can be said about God alone that He is **forbearing**, while with regard to anyone else it would be said that he is slow to anger. How sublime this is for those who understand it.[16]

forbearing [*erekh appayim*]: He does not hasten to exact punishment from one who has done an evil thing—perhaps *he will turn back to Him, and He will have mercy upon him* (Isa. 56:7).[17]

unending kindness and faithfulness [*rav ḥesed ve-ʾemet*]: Onqelos translated this "and abounding to do goodness and truth," for the word **unending** serves both words, as if it said "unending kindness and unending faithfulness."[18] *Ḥesed* is a goodness that comes from someone in a superior position [and is granted] to someone in a lesser position and in need of it; in German, it is *Gnade* or *Huld*. *Emet* is faithfulness °(*Treue* in German), to keep His word and to reward those who do His will.[19] It is said about Him, may He be Blessed, that He is **of unending kindness and faithfulness** [that is,] the source of kindness and faithfulness; these attributes, without measure and end, are his Essence. It is translated thus in German.

14. The last sentence was Rashi, based on R.H. 17b and its interpretation of our verse; Mendelssohn, however, deftly melded this with Deut. 32:39.

15. Cf. *Jerusalem* in *JubA*, 8:116–117; Arkush, *Jerusalem*, 47–48.

16. Ramban, with substantial expansion.

17. Rashi, edited and with the addition of the verse from Isaiah.

18. Ibn Ezra; the reference to Onqelos was added by Mendelssohn.

19. The last phrase was from Rashi.

7 "Who preserves His kindness even to the thousandth generation, who forgives transgression, rebellion, and sin; yet allows nothing to go unpunished, but visits the transgression of parents on the children and children's children, in the third and fourth generation."

Commentary

7. **who preserves His kindness** [*noṣer ḥesed*]: preserves and remembers His kindness, as with the meaning of *He was mindful of the love and faithfulness to the house of Israel* °(Ps. 98:3).[20]

to the thousandth generation [*la-ʾalafim*]: members of the third generation are referred to as *shilleshim*, and the fourth generation as *ribbeʿim*, and those who belong to the thousandth generation are referred to as *alafim*, as Rashbam explained earlier in Exodus °(20:6). Rashi explained *alafim* as two thousand generations.

transgression [*ʿavon*]: from the root *ʿayin–vav–heh*. A crooked deed [*maʿaseh meʿuvat*] is referred to as a transgression [*ʿavon*] °(in German *Missetat*). With regard to bearing or suffering that transgression: if he is the sinner or one who caused [another] to sin, then he has to correct the crooked [deed][21] or suffer his punishment, as in *one who eats thereof shall bear his guilt* °(Lev. 19:8), meaning that he will suffer his punishment; or *he shall bear her guilt* °(Num. 30:16), wherein the punishment will be removed from her and will be upon him, for he is the cause of the sinning. But if the person bearing the transgression is the person against whom the transgression occurred, then the crooked deed is not in need of correction, and it is rather a matter of forgiveness and absolution.[22]

rebellion [*va-feshaʿ*]: [the meaning here is] as the Sages said—"*peshaʿim* are the rebellious sins, as the verse states *the king of Moab has rebelled* [*pashaʿ*] *against me* °(2 Kgs. 3:7), and also *then Libnah rebelled* [*tifshaʿ*] °(ibid, 8:22 and 2 Chron. 21:10)."[23] The notion is that of rebellion against the legitimate authority of the ruler; in German, [this is translated as] *Abfall*.

20. Cf. Ramban.

21. Alluding to Ecc. 1:15, *A twisted thing cannot be made straight*.

22. Based on Ibn Ezra.

23. Yoma 36b. Rashi drew upon the same rabbinic passage, but Mendelssohn cited it in full. See also Ibn Ezra.

sin [*ve-ḥaṭṭaʾah*]: this includes all thoughts and deeds committed in error,[24] for one who flings something and misses the mark at which he was aiming is [referred to as] a *ḥoṭeʾ*, as in *sling a stone at a hair and not miss* [*yaḥaṭiʾ*] °(Judg. 20:16). So too, one who performs a deed or has a thought that is incompatible with the [ultimate] end, which is the eternal felicity of man, is a *ḥoṭe* °(*fehlt* in German), and that deed or thought is referred to as *ḥeṭʿ*, *ḥaṭṭʿat*, or *ḥaṭaʾah* °(*Fehltritt*, *Sünde*).

yet allows nothing to go unpunished [*ve-naqqeh* (*lo yenaqqeh*)]: according to the *peshaṭ*, *ve-naqqeh* is an infinitive, as in *if you oppress them* [*ʿanneh teʿanneh*] °(Ex. 22:22),[25] and the intended meaning is that God does not forgo [the punishment for] the transgression entirely, but exacts punishment from the transgressor a little at a time.[26] This is how it is translated in German, for in that language the punishment of a transgression is *Ahndung*.[27] However, from the wording *ve-naqqeh lo yenaqqeh* [lit.: He clears, He does not clear], the Sages taught: "He clears [the guilt] for penitents, but does not clear [the guilt] for those who do not repent."[28] As such, the word *ve-naqqeh* was counted among the [thirteen] attributes.[29]

visits the transgression of parents [*poqed ʿavon avot*]: this is also an attribute of mercy,[30] for He does not exact punishment from the transgressor all at once, even though He does not forgo [the punishment due to] him entirely. Rather, He visits his transgression—exacting punishment with *righteousness and justice* (Hos. 2:21), one at a time—**on the children and the children's children**. This applies when the [children] carry on with the deeds of their fathers, as it is explained in another scriptural passage, *namely, those who hate Me* (Ex. 20:5).[31]

These then are the thirteen attributes as identified by the Sages:[32] **the Eternal is the immutable eternal being** [*yhvh yhvh*] are two, for even the Great Name is

24. Ibn Ezra.
25. Ibid.
26. Rashi.
27. Mendelssohn rendered the phrase: *Der aber nichts ohne Ahndung hingehen läßt*.
28. Yoma 86a, and cited by Rashi.
29. Ibn Ezra. On the thirteen attributes, see the last paragraph of his comment and n. 32.
30. Ibn Ezra.
31. This last sentence was from Rashi, and gave voice to the rabbinic notion that qualified the extension of guilt onto subsequent generations by stating that children were punished only when they perpetuate the misdeeds of their parents. The mercy that Mendelssohn (following Ibn Ezra) stressed in the opening line of this comment was the notion that when children repudiated the ways of their parents, neither parents nor children were punished.
32. These two verses served as the liturgical-penitential basis of God's mercifulness, which rabbinic tradition enumerated as the thirteen divine attributes; see, e.g., R.H. 17b. The rabbinic sources, however, did not delineate the attributes with any specificity—which is to say, how to

part of the enumeration of attributes.[33] The word **all-powerful-God** [*el*] is the third. **All-merciful** [*raḥum*] is the fourth and **all-gracious** [*ḥannun*] is the fifth. **Forbearing** [*erekh appayim*] is the sixth. **Unending kindness** [*rav ḥesed*] is the seventh, and **unending faithfulness** [*rav emet*] is the eighth. **Preserves kindness to the thousandth generation** [*noṣer ḥesed la-ʾalafim*] is the ninth. **Forgives transgression** [*nose ʿavon*] is the tenth, **forgives rebellion** [*nose pesha*ʿ] is the eleventh, and **forgives sin** [*nose ḥaṭṭaʾah*] is the twelfth, for the forgiveness of transgression, rebellion, and sin are not the same; each has a unique aspect, and therefore each one is referred to as an attribute in itself.[34] *Ve-naqqeh* is the thirteenth. Everything written subsequently in the verse is an explanation of forgiveness for transgression, for this is the manner in which He forgives, that He **visits the transgression of parents on the children**, etc.[35]

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8 Mosheh hurried; he bowed to the ground, [and] prostrated himself to worship.

Commentary

8. **Mosheh hurried** [*va-yemaher mosheh*]: when he saw the divine Presence passing [before him] and heard these wondrous attributes directly from the almighty—[attributes] which are all kindness and mercy, even for one [who transgresses] intentionally and rebels against his king and God[36]—he understood that the moment of anger had passed, and that God had completely reconciled Himself to Israel. Moses immediately flung himself down and prostrated himself with *praise and thanksgiving to the Eternal* (1 Chron. 25:3) and appealed to him, as [the text] will go on to indicate. And so it was rendered by the *Targum Yerushalmi*:[37] "he bowed down on the ground and gave thanks and praise."

he bowed [*va-yiqqod*]: this is a verb with a doubled consonant,[38] from the [nominal] stem *qodqod* [the crown of the head], since he put his head to the ground.

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parse vv. 6–7—and medieval Jewish scholars proposed a dozen different enumerations. Mendelssohn's enumeration followed Ibn Ezra and the normative liturgical tradition.

33. In other words, even though the Tetragrammaton was a proper name, it was nevertheless included here in the list of attributes.

34. This point was made by Ramban.

35. The last sentence was suggested by Ramban (whose enumeration differed from Ibn Ezra's) but was adapted by Mendelssohn to fit his presentation.

36. The reference to divine kingship was not mere rhetorical flourish. It was consistent with Mendelssohn's political understanding of the relationship of God and Israel, and it paralleled his description of the sin of the golden calf as *lèse-majesté* in part II of *Jerusalem*; see *JubA*, 8:185–88, Arkush, *Jerusalem*, 120–22.

37. See n. 11 above.

38. That is, a geminate root, *quf–dalet–dalet*.

This is the same pattern as *when the money was gone* [*va-yittom*] °(Gen. 47:15);[39] and [the plural] *they bowed* [*va-yiqqedu*] (Ex. 4:31) is like *came to an end* [*va-yittemu*] °(Deut. 34:8).[40]

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9 And spoke: "If I found favor in the eyes of my Lord, then may my Lord Himself yet go with us; it is indeed a stiff-necked people, but forgive our transgressions and sins, and take us as your possession."

Commentary

9. **it is indeed a stiff-necked people** [*ḳi ʿam qesheh ʿoref hu*]: [this should be understood] according to its *peshaṭ*, [with *ḳi*] meaning "for."[41] Moses prayed before God that He should go in their midst on account of their being a stiff-necked people, since after the Holy One was reconciled with them, He would be better for their stiff-neckedness than an angel. Moses was seeking to increase their benefit, for they are His people and His possession. And just as, at the moment of anger, it was better for them that He send an angel to go before them because they were a stiff-necked people—as God had said, *lest I destroy you on the way* °(Ex. 33:3)—so now at a moment of reconciliation it is good for them with the divine Presence on account of their being a stiff-necked people; the gracious and merciful God will show grace and mercy to his servants °(Ramban).

forgive our transgressions and sins [*ve-salaḥta la-ʿavonenu u-le-ḥaṭṭaʾtenu*]: from his great humility Moses included himself with [the rest of] Israel and said **our transgressions and sins**. He did not, however, say "our rebellions" on account of his great stature, for it was not possible that he would rebel °(Ibn Ezra).[42]

take us as your possession [*u-neḥaltanu*]: Jonathan ben Uzziel translated this as if the word were *ve-tanḥilenu*[43]—"give us the land that you promised to our fathers." Rashi explained [that Moses said] "make us a special inheritance"—this was the request [made earlier], *only then shall we be distinguished, I and your nation*, (Ex. 33:16)—[wherein Moses asked] "let us be set apart in this from all the nations, that you not rest your divine Presence upon them." This is how it is translated in the German.

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39. From the geminate root *tav–mem–mem*.

40. Ibn Ezra.

41. The exegetical question was how to parse the relationship between the two halves of the verse, and this hinged on the meaning and function of the word *ḳi*.

42. Ibn Ezra's comment appeared in his lengthy exposition of vv. 6–7.

43. Formulated in the causative sense, meaning to allot or to apportion.

10 The other spoke, See! I make a covenant °(that is, I give you an assurance), I will perform miracles before the eyes of your entire people the like of which has not been done on the entire earth and among all the nations; so that all the people, among whom you are, will know how awesome are the deeds of the Eternal that I will do for you.

Commentary

10. **make a covenant** [*koret berit*]: [This covenant is] spoken of in the following section °(v. 27), [when it states] *for on the* [*basis of the*] *content of these words I make with you and Yisrael a covenant*, and these words refer to the stipulations that are recorded from *Observe* [v. 11] until the end of the section.[44] [God is saying that] on account of this I will write the second tablets and it will serve as a testimonial document,[45] as a guarantee that I will go with you[46] and that I will forgive them and will take possession of you as a nation, just as you entreated me; *this too, what you have said, I will do* (Ex. 33:17). **I will perform** for you a wondrous thing **before the eyes of your entire people**, so that everyone who sees you will be astonished and will know that I placed my Glory upon you, which I have not done from the day I created the heavens and the earth. This thing is the radiance of Moses' face, and it is written when he died, *his eye was not dim and his lifeblood had not decreased* °(Deut. 34:7), contrary to the nature of the elderly. And the meaning of **which has not been done on the entire earth** is that it was unheard of **among all the nations**.[47]

One cannot interpret this verse as saying that God was promising to do miracles at this moment **the like of which has not been done** previously **on the entire earth and among all the nations**, since from this point onward there were no miracles performed for them greater than what had been done in Egypt and at the sea; indeed, the miracles created and performed earlier were greater. The meaning, rather, hints at[48] the wondrous thing that He will do with Moses before all the people.

44. The section ends with v. 26.

45. The comment up until this point was taken from Ibn Ezra; see the following note.

46. This phrase, and the reference to Ex. 33:17 at the end of the sentence, were from Rashbam; the words connecting them were Mendelssohn's own.

47. The remainder of the comment (see the previous note) reverted back to Ibn Ezra, with light revisions.

48. The paragraph, until this point, was drawn from Ramban, but at this juncture Ramban's commentary added that the meaning hinted at "the proximity of the divine Presence among them, and of God being with Moses for glory and splendor, with hidden and wondrous matters . . . ." Mendelssohn broke off with Ramban mid-sentence in order to preserve his reading with Ibn Ezra and Rashbam above.

awesome [*ki nora hu*]: as it is written, *they were afraid to come near him* °(below, v. 30).[49]

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11 Observe, for your own good, what I command you today; I am driving out before you the Emori, Kenaani, Ḥitti, Perizi, Ḥivi, and Yevusi people.

12 Beware that you not make a covenant with the inhabitants of the land, with whom you go to war; it would be a trap for you °(that is, plunge you into ruin).

13 You shall rather tear down their altars, smash their statues; and cut down their groves.

14 For you shall bow down to worship no other divine beings; for the Eternal also bears the name Jealous—he is a jealous God who can suffer none other.

Commentary

11. **Observe** [*shemor lekha*]: for your own benefit, for all God's commandments are beneficial for those who do them.

driving out [*goresh*]: this is a transitive verb from the simple [*qal*] conjugation; and so too in the verse *a widow or a divorced woman* [*gerushah*] °(Lev. 21:14). This section is parallel to the earlier section [beginning with] *behold I send an angel* °(Ex. 23:20[–33]) and its relation to the section that preceded it.[50] The intended meaning is that [the Israelites] should return to the first set of [covenantal] stipulations, as per the conditions he made with them with the first tablets.[51]

12. **beware** [*hishamer lekha*]: this is akin to *do not bend down before their gods* °(Ex. 23:24).[52]

13. **you shall rather tear down their altars** [*ki et mizbeḥotam*]: this is akin to *you shall rather destroy* [*their gods*] °(Ex. 23:24).[53]

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49. Rashbam.
50. Ibn Ezra, referring to 23:12–19.
51. This sentence reformulated a point made by Ramban.
52. Ibn Ezra.
53. Ibid.

14. **the name Jealous** [*qanna shemo*]: He is jealous to exact punishment and does not forgo it. This is what *qinʾah* always means: He maintains His superiority and punishes those who abandon Him °(Rashi). We have already explained elsewhere °(Ex. 20:5) the meaning of *qinʾah*, which is the anger directed at someone who gives respect and affection to an object unworthy of it, and withholds [respect and affection] from something deserving of it.

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15 If you make a covenant with the inhabitants of the land; and they act lewdly with their gods and offer sacrifices to their gods, then invite some of you and you eat of their sacrifices.

16 You would also choose from their daughters for your sons; and if their daughters act lewdly with their gods, so too they will lead your sons to act lewdly with their gods.

Commentary

15. **If you make a covenant** [*pen tikhrot*]: this is akin to *you shall not make a covenant with them and with their gods* °(Ex. 23:32), but [the section here] goes on to explain: **if you make a covenant**, etc., **and if their daughters act lewdly** (v. 16).[54]

and you eat of their sacrifices [*ve-ʾakhalta mi-zivḥo*]: you might reason that there is no punishment for eating [from such sacrifices]; but I will consider it as if you assented to [idolatrous] worship, since by this [act] you will eventually come to take their daughters for your sons °(Rashi). However, in Ramban's opinion this constitutes an admonition against eating from the idolatrous sacrifices, and the explanation of this verse is as follows: Be careful not to **make a covenant with the inhabitants of the land** and go astray after their gods, for they will be sacrificing to them constantly; and lest they invite you **and you eat of their sacrifices** and take **from their daughters for your sons** (v. 16). Thus, they are all admonitions that follow upon the first prohibition, when the verse stated [*Beware*] *that you not make a covenant*.

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17 Do not make for yourself any gods of molten metal.

18 Observe the holiday of the unleavened bread. For seven days you shall eat unleavened bread as I have commanded you, at the appointed

54. Ibn Ezra. This comment sought to clarify the conditional nature of the verse and its consonance with the outright prohibition of Ex. 23:32.

time in the month of ripened grain;[55] for in the month of ripened grain you went out of Miṣrayim.

Commentary

17. **gods of molten metal** [*elohe massekhah*]: Scripture added this admonition here on account of the incident of the [golden] calf: that even if their thoughts are directed to heaven, they should not make themselves [such gods] to be a guide.[56]

18. **holiday of the unleavened bread** [*et ḥag ha-maṣṣot*]: Scripture mentioned the three pilgrimage festivals as it did in the [parallel] section above,[57] and the meaning is evident, for it follows upon the admonition against idolatry, as we explained there.[58]

month of ripened grain [*ḥodesh ha-ʾaviv*]: the month of early ripening, when the grain is in its first stage of ripening.[59]

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19 Every first-born of the womb belongs to Me; also all the male offspring that your cattle produce, the first-born of an ox and of a sheep.

Commentary

19. **every first-born of the womb belongs to Me** [*kol peṭer reḥem li*]: [this is written] with regards to humans.[60] Scripture raised the subject of first-borns because they too are a remembrance of the exodus from Egypt,[61] just like the holidays.

also all the male offspring that your cattle produce, etc. [*ve-khol miqnekha tizzakhar*]: [this verse may be restated as] "all the first-born of an ox and of a sheep that your cattle produce that is male," [i.e.,] when a male animal causes her womb to open [*yifṭor*].[62]

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55. See *Beʾur* to Ex. 23:15 above.
56. Ramban to v. 11.
57. Ex. 23:14ff.
58. Ramban to v. 11. While Ramban pointed back to his commentary on Ex. 20:21, Mendelssohn was pointing to his *Beʾur* to Ex. 23.
59. Rashi.
60. Ibid.
61. Ibn Ezra.
62. Based on Rashi, with reformulation.

first-born [*peṭer*]: the word means "opening," as in *the start of a quarrel is like releasing* [*poṭer*] *water* °(Prov. 17:14); this is Rashi's explanation, and likewise [the translations of] Onqelos and Jonathan ben Uzziel. It is also grammatically commensurate with other scriptural passages that use this word, as well as with the Sages' common use of the word *paṭur* [exempt] as the opposite of liable. It would thus appear that the broad connotation [of this word] is the release of something constrained and the opening of a place of confinement that held it back, or the removal of a restraint by which something is constrained from doing what is natural to it. Scripture states *Jehoyada the priest had not dismissed* [*paṭar*] *the divisions* °(2 Chron. 23:8)—he did not free them to go, but held them back. [The phrase] *poṭer mayim*[63] means that one releases water and removes the barriers that prevent them from flowing in their usual manner. *They open wide* [*yafṭiru*] *their lips* °(Ps. 22:8)—they free their lips to say everything that is in their heart. [In rabbinic Hebrew,] one who is liable for something has no right to do something contrary to his obligation, and he is thus like someone restricted and constrained by that obligation; conversely, if he is released and free from an obligation, he is exempt [*paṭur*]. In this way one can explain [*the singers . . .*] *were free* [*peṭurim*], *because they were on duty day and night* °(1 Chron. 9:33) as "they were freed from other services, for they were preoccupied with singing day and night." In German, this is *frei, los-*, *losgelassen*.[64] And so [in our context], the **first-born of the womb** means releasing the womb, when its constriction is first loosened.[65]

the male offspring [that your cattle] produce [(*ve-khol miqneḳha*) *tizzaḳhar*]: this is the passive conjugation, and the word cattle [*miqneh*] is in this case feminine,[66] that is, she will produce males—males will emerge from her.[67] In the opinion of the Aramaic translators Onqelos and Jonathan ben Uzziel, the word is a second-person imperative, "consecrate the males."

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20 The first-born of an ass you shall redeem with a sheep, but when you do not redeem it, then you must break its neck; you shall redeem the first-born of your sons, [and] one shall not appear before Me empty °(without an offering).

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63. See the example cited from Proverbs above.

64. There was a typographical error in the transcription of the German; the correct reading was suggested by Gideon Freudenthal.

65. This was substantially drawn from Radaq, *Sefer ha-Shorashim*, s.v. *peh–ṭet–resh*, with expansion.

66. The word *miqneh* is masculine.

67. Radaq, *Sefer ha-Shorashim*, s.v. *zayin–ḳhaft–resh*.

Commentary

20. **first-born of an ass** [*peṭer ḥamor*]: but not that of another unclean animal.[68]

redeem with a sheep [*tifdeh be-seh*]: he gives the sheep to the *ḳohen*; [the sheep] is a non-consecrated possession of the *ḳohen*, and the owner can use the firstling ass for common labor °(Rashi).

you must break its neck [*va-ʿarafto*]: kill it with a cleaver,[69] at the nape.

you shall redeem the first-born of your sons [*ḳol bekhor banekha tifdeh*]: its redemption is set at five *selaʿim*, as it is written *The redemption, from one month, is . . .* [*five silver shekels*] °(Num. 18:16).[70]

one shall not appear before Me empty [*lo yeraʾu panai reqam*]: when you go up on the festival to appear [before God], you shall not appear before Me empty; rather, bring a burned offering for the appearance before God.[71]

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21 Six days you may work, but on the seventh day you shall celebrate; so too at the plowing time and the harvest time you shall celebrate.

Commentary

21. **six days you may work** [*sheshet yamim taʿavod*]: this is how it was written the first time °(Ex. 23:12);[72] Scripture mentioned the Sabbath alongside the holiday of unleavened bread and the consecration of the first-born since they are a reminder of the exodus from Egypt, as it indicates in the later [repetition] of the ten *dibrot*, *You must remember that you were also slaves* [in Egypt], etc., *therefore the Eternal your God commanded you to observe the day of rest* °(Deut. 5:15).[73]

so too at the plowing time and the harvest time you shall celebrate [*be-ḥarish u-va-qaṣir tishbot*]: according to its *peshaṭ* interpretation, Scripture mentioned

68. Rashi.
69. Ibid.
70. Ibid.
71. Ibid, with slight editing.
72. Ibn Ezra.
73. Ramban. Note that Mendelssohn took only Ramban's more narrowly focused interpretation; elsewhere Ramban suggested that as a sign and proof of God's powers, the Exodus was predicated upon the more fundamental belief in creation. See his commentary on Ex. 13:16 and 20:2.

plowing and harvesting because they are essential to man's existence;[74] this applies all the more so to other labors.

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22 You shall observe the festival of weeks, the festival of first-fruits of the wheat harvest; as well as the festival of the ingathering of fruit, when the year concludes its cycle.

23 Three times a year; all your men-folk shall appear before the Lord the Eternal, before the God of Yisrael.

Commentary

22. **festival of weeks** [*ve-ḥag shavuʿot*]: this is the feast of the harvest that Scripture mentioned above °(Ex. 23:16).

the festival of first-fruits of the wheat harvest [*bikkure qeṣir ḥiṭṭim*]: the festival at which you bring the first-fruits of the wheat harvest for the two loaves of bread, which is the first meal offering that is brought to the Temple from the new wheat; for the meal offering of the *ʿomer* that is brought on Passover was made from barley.[75]

as well as the festival of the ingathering of fruit [*ve-ḥag ha-ʾasif*]: when you gather your crops from the field to the home, as in *take it* [*va-ʾasafto*] *to you in your house* °(Deut. 22:2).[76]

when the year concludes its cycle [*tequfat ha-shanah*]: [the word *tequfah*] denotes a circle and rotation.[77] Both Rashi and Ibn Ezra explained the phrase *tequfat ha-shanah* as the beginning of the coming year, and earlier Scripture had *end of the year* [*be-ṣeʾt ha-shanah*] °(Ex. 23:16). But the meaning is the same since *tequfat ha-shanah* is a coterminous term, and the end of the outgoing year is the beginning of the coming year. Onqelos and Jonathan ben Uzziel translated it "with the going-out of the year" according to its intended meaning,[78] but it is possible to translate *tequfat ha-shanah* "when the year completes its cycle," and so it is translated in German.

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74. Ibn Ezra, cited also by Ramban.
75. Rashi.
76. Ibid.
77. Ibid.
78. I.e., but not according to the straightforward meaning of the words.

23. **before the Lord the Eternal, before the God of Yisrael** [*et pene ha-ʾadon adonai elohe yisraʾel*]: in this section, Scripture added **God of Yisrael** on account of the incident of the calf.[79]

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24 For I will drive out nations before you, and expand your borders; nevertheless no one will covet your land, when you go up to appear before the Eternal your God, three times a year."

Commentary

24. **I will drive out** [*ki orish*]: its meaning is indicated by the Aramaic translation [of Onqelos], "I will drive out"; and likewise, *begin to conquer* [*rash*] °(Deut. 2:24, 31) and *he drove out* [*va-yoresh*] *the Emori* °(Num. 21:32), meaning expulsion.[80]

expand your borders [*ve-hirḥavti*]: lest you say "the border cities are far from the Temple—how can I leave them to go up to Jerusalem?"—I [God] nevertheless assure you that **no one will covet your land**.

no one will covet, etc. [*lo yaḥmod*]: I will send such fear into the hearts of [the non-Israelite] neighbors that they will not covet the cities emptied of its residents when all the males go up to Jerusalem.[81] I have already informed you °(Ex. 20:14) of the meaning of covetousness and how it differs from desire: desire is in the heart, but coveting is connected to deed.[82] There is no doubt that the nations of the world will desire to conquer that *good land* (Deut. 3:25), but due to the terror and fear that will be upon them they will remain peaceful and will not covet to take it in deed.

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25 Do not slaughter My sacrifice with leavened bread; and nothing shall remain of the sacrifice of the Passover festival through the night until morning.

26 You shall bring the first of your earliest fruits of the land to the house of the Eternal your God. Do not cook your young cattle in the milk of its mother.

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79. Ibn Ezra. These words were absent in the earlier parallel to this verse in Ex. 23:17, and Ibn Ezra suggested that their addition here was in response to Ex. 32:4 and 8, where the Israelites exclaimed *Yisrael! These are your gods*.

80. Rashi.

81. Parts of this comment was drawn from P. Peʾah 3:7 and Ibn Ezra.

82. See the overview of the Decalogue following his *Beʾur* to Ex. 20:14, and n. 134 there.

Commentary

25. **do not slaughter . . . with leavened bread** [*lo tishḥaṭ ʿal ḥameṣ*]: do not sacrifice the Passover offering while there is still leavened [bread] in the home of a member of the group [assigned to eat from the offering].[83]

nothing shall remain [*ve-lo yalin*]: according to the *peshaṭ*, this proscription applies to the entire offering; one should not leave over of the flesh until the morning—for *what remains of it until morning, you shall burn in the fire* (Ex. 12:10)—[nor] of the fat, which should be burned by morning. Onqelos translated this as applying [specifically] to the fat that is offered up °(and similarly Rashi, applying it to the sacrificial parts[84]), for this is the meaning of *ḥag* as it says there *and the fat of My festival offering* [*ḥelev ḥaggi*] *shall not be left overnight until the morning* °(Ex. 23:18), and all the precepts here are repetitions [of those mentioned earlier] °(Ramban).

26. **first**, etc. [*reʾshit*]: I explained this above in the pericope *mishpatim* °(Ex. 23:19).

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27 The Eternal spoke to Mosheh, "write down these words, for on the [basis of the] content of these words I make with you and Yisrael a covenant."

28 Mosheh remained there with the Eternal for forty days and forty nights, ate no food and drank no drink; the Eternal wrote[85] on the tablets the words of the covenant, namely the ten commandments.

Commentary

27. **write down**, etc. [*ketov lekha*]: God commanded that Moses write in a scroll the conditions of the new covenant that he made now with Israel, and they are the words said in this section, beginning with *I drive out before you*, etc. (above, v. 11).[86]

for on the [basis of the] content of these words [*ki ʿal pi ha-devarim haʾelleh*]: that you should not go after other gods and not make a covenant with the inhabitants of the land and marry with them, etc. (above, vv. 15–16).[87]

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83. Rashi.
84. These refer to various kinds of fats and organs that are burned on the altar.
85. The antecedent was added by Mendelssohn for clarity; see the Commentary.
86. The words beginning "said in this section" are from Rashbam.
87. Rashbam.

28. **wrote on the tablets** [*va-yikhtov ʿal ha-luḥot*]: this refers not to Moses, but to God, for so He said *I will write the words on the tablets* °(above, v. 1), and so too in Deuteronomy, *I went up the mountain and had two tablets in hand; there the Eternal wrote on the tablets* °(Deut. 10:3–4).[88]

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29 When Mosheh went down from Mount Sinai—Mosheh had the two tablets of testimony in hand when he went down from the mountain; Mosheh did not know that the skin of his face cast rays because the Eternal[89] had spoken with him.

Commentary

29. **when Mosheh went down** [*be-redet mosheh*]: when he brought the second tablets on the Day of Atonement.[90]

rays [*qaran*]: this means rays of light, as in *gives off rays* [*qarnayim*], which is the restatement of *it is a brilliant light* °(Hab. 3:4). The gleam of light that is emitted by a luminous body is referred to as a ray, since it projects and extends forth like a horn. The meaning [of our verse] is that his face radiated like the brightness of the sky from the divine glory that emanated upon [Moses] when God spoke with him.[91] Onqelos translated it likewise, "[Moses did not know] that the radiance of glory on his face had increased. . . ."

had spoken with him [*be-dabbero itto*]: this means: when God spoke with him.[92]

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30 When Aharon and all the children of Yisrael saw Mosheh, and behold! His face cast rays of light from itself; so they were afraid to draw near to him.

31 Mosheh called out to them, [and] Aharon and all the princes in the congregation turned back to him; there Mosheh spoke with them.

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88. Rashbam and Ibn Ezra.

89. The antecedent was added by Mendelssohn for clarity.

90. Rashi. The tradition identifying Moses' second descent from Sinai with the Day of Atonement had deep resonance in rabbinic and liturgical literature; see, e.g., PRE ch. 46, and Tan. *Ki Tissa* [§ 31].

91. This combined elements of Rashi, Ibn Ezra, and Rashbam.

92. Ibn Ezra.

Commentary

30. **Aharon . . . saw** [*va-yar aharon*]: [Aaron,] who was at the head, and **all the children of Yisrael** who went out to meet Moses upon his descent.[93]

31. **Mosheh called out to them** [*va-yiqra alehem mosheh*]: they had been retreating out of fear, and he called out to them to return.[94]

the princes in the congregation [*ha-nesiʾim ba-ʿedah*]: this is like "princes of the congregation."[95]

there Mosheh spoke with them [*va-yedabber mosheh alehem*]: he informed them of the forgiveness [they were granted] for their transgression, and of the tablets that he brought down.[96]

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32 Afterwards, though, all the children of Yisrael drew near; and he instructed them all that the Eternal had said to him on the mountain of Sinai.

33 When Mosheh had finished speaking with them; he placed a covering before his face.

Commentary

32. **afterwards** [*ve-ʾahare ḵhen*]: when all the children of Israel saw that Moses was speaking with the princes, they all approached, **and he instructed them . . . on the mountain of Sinai**, that being the second [copy of the] ten *dibrot* that He gave to him, and all the stipulations of the covenant from *Observe* (v. 11) to the end of the section (v. 26).[97]

33. **finished speaking . . . placed** [*va-yeḵhal . . . va-yitten*]: when he finished speaking with them about the above-mentioned matter, he placed, etc.[98]

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93. Mendelssohn adopted the first part of the explanation, that Aaron led the nation out to greet Moses, from Ibn Ezra, but abandoned his explanation that *all the children of Israel* referred to the princes who were mentioned in the next verse. See the commentary on the next two verses.

94. Ramban.

95. Rashi.

96. Ramban.

97. Ibid.

98. Ibid.

covering [*masveh*]: its meaning is indicated by Onqelos, "face-covering," a covering that is placed against the face and the eyes °(*Larve* in German).[99] Jonathan ben Uzziel and the *Targum Yerushalmi* translated this as "veil," and this was the interpretation of Rashbam and Ibn Ezra, who indicated that it was similar to [*he washes*] *his robe* [*sutoh*] *in the blood of grapes* °(Gen. 49:11). Ibn Ezra wrote that the letter *vav* was sometimes enunciated and sometimes silent, as in *ʿavlatah* °(Ps. 92:16) and *ʿolatah* °(Job 5:16),[100] or *young* [*ʿul*] *of days* °(Isa. 65:20) and *even youngsters* [*ʿavilim*] °(Job 19:18), *into the middle* [*tokh*] *of the camp* °(Deut. 23:11–12) and *he cut them in the middle* [*ba-tavekh*] °(Gen. 15:10). However, in the opinion of Rashbam and Radaq, they are two separate stems.[101]

Moses donned the mask out of respect for the rays of glory so that not everybody could indulge themselves in them, but he removed it when he spoke with the Israelites and when the divine Presence spoke with him.[102]

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34 But whenever Mosheh came before the Eternal to speak with Him, he removed the covering until he went out again; then he went out and spoke with the children of Yisrael, that which he had been commanded.

35 There the children of Yisrael saw the face of Mosheh, that it cast rays; afterwards, Mosheh again placed the covering before his face, until he went in again to speak with the Eternal.[103]

Commentary

34. **whenever Mosheh came** [*u-ve-vo mosheh*]: this is written in the present tense—this was how he always proceeded;[104] and so it is translated in German.

before the Eternal [*lifne adonai*]: to the Designated-Tent, **he removed the covering** so that he could speak with God face to face.[105]

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99. Rashi. Mendelssohn understood Onqelos and Rashi to be reading *masveh* as some form of mask.

100. The consonantal spelling and the meaning of these words was the same.

101. This last sentence referred back to *masveh* and *sutoh*; cf. the entries in Radaq's *Sefer ha-Shorashim*, s.v. *samekh–vav–heh* and *samekh–vav–tav*.

102. Rashi.

103. The biblical text has only a personal pronoun instead of "the Eternal."

104. Ramban.

105. Ibn Ezra.

until he went out again [*ʿad ṣeʾto*]: from the tent, and when he went out, he did so without the covering.[106]

then he went out and spoke [*ve-yaṣa ve-dibber*]: he spoke the word of God to them with an uncovered face, and they saw the rays of glory that radiated in his face.[107]

35. **the children of Yisrael saw**, etc. [*ve-raʾu bene yisraʾel*]: after the children of Israel saw the rays of glory on his face while he was speaking with them, he returned the covering to his face once he departed from them [and kept it on] **until he went in again to speak with the Eternal**; and when he came to speak with Him—with the divine Presence—he removed it from his face.[108]

106. Rashi.
107. Ibid., with expansion.
108. Ibid., with expansion.

Exodus 40:34–38 and Epilogue

[Exodus 35–40, the last six chapters of this biblical book, returned to the construction of the Tabernacle, here describing the realization of the edifice and all its implements and vestments. The last five verses of the book spoke of God's Presence in the Tabernacle. Following the comment to the last verse, Mendelssohn added an Epilogue that reflected on the meaning of the Tabernacle, with a view to the proper role of artisanship in society.]

40:34 The cloud covered the Designated-Tent; and the glory of the Eternal filled the Tabernacle.

35 Mosheh could not enter the Designated-Tent for the cloud rested upon it; and the glory of the Eternal filled the Tabernacle.

36 As soon as the cloud rose from the Tabernacle, the children of Yisrael set out; in all their journeys.

37 But as long as the cloud did not rise; they did not set out until it rose again.

38 For in the day there was a cloud of the Eternal on the Tabernacle, and at night there was a fire on it; before the eyes of all the house of Yisrael, in all their journeys.

Commentary

35. **Mosheh could not enter the Designated-Tent** [*ve-lo yakhol mosheh lavo el ohel moʿed*]: at the time that it was erected.[1]

1. Rashbam.

for the cloud rested upon it [*ki shakhan ʿalav he-ʿanan*]: immediately, in order to show God's affection for Israel. Afterwards, the cloud lifted from the tent and rested on the Ark, as it is written *So I will appear there at set times, to speak with you above the cover* [of the Ark], *between the two cherubim* °(Ex. 25:22). Following that, Moses came to the tent of meeting, as it is written *When Moses came into the tent to talk to Him, he heard the voice*, etc., *between the two cherubim, and He conversed with him* °(Num. 7:89). Likewise, one finds in the Temple that *the priests were not able to remain and perform the service because of the cloud, for the presence of the Eternal filled the house of the Eternal* (1 Kgs. 8:11); when the Temple was completed, God sanctified it with a cloud, after which God contracted his Presence [to the place] above the Ark, between the poles °(Rashbam). The Sages similarly stated: "as long as the cloud was upon [the Tabernacle] he could not enter; when the cloud was removed, [Moses] entered and spoke with Him."[2]

According to the opinion of the Sages,[3] this occurred[4] on the eighth day [of its dedication], for they said that the divine Presence did not rest on the Tabernacle in the sight of all the Israelites until Aaron performed [the inaugural sacrifices]. This is implied in what is stated in Leviticus: *That which the Eternal commanded you shall do; then the Glory of the Eternal will appear to you* °(Lev. 9:6), after which it is written *the Glory of the Eternal appeared there before the entire nation* °(ibid., v. 23). The implication [of these verses] is that the cloud did not cover the Designated-Tent and the Glory of the Eternal did not fill the Tabernacle until that [eighth] day. It would appear, in the opinion of the Sages, that all the sections from the beginning of Leviticus until *It was on the eighth day* (Lev. 9:1) were said to Moses from the Tent on the first day of the ordination,[5] when the cloud did not yet cover the Tent. This is the [narrative] manner of Scripture; it began with God's commandment to Moses that the installation of the Tabernacle be completed by the first day of the first month,[6] whereupon [Scripture] indicated that Moses did this and completed all the work;[7] the cloud then covered the Tent, and *it was always so* (Num. 9:16). Scripture then returned to the beginning of the [divine] speech with Moses from the Tent in the days of ordination, stating [*The Eternal*] *called Moses* (Lev. 1:1). All this is in proper order in accordance with the manner of Scripture, to finish with a matter with which it began, and then to return to the beginning.

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2. Sifra, *Baraita de-Rabbi Yishmaʿel*, 1:8; and cited by Rashi.

3. Ibid., *Va-Yiqra* 2:5. This entire comment, as Mendelssohn indicated at the end, was based on Ramban.

4. That is, the cloud rested on the Tabernacle.

5. *millu'im*; see Ex. 29:35 and Lev. 8:33.

6. Ex. 40:2.

7. See Ex. 40:33.

However, in the Midrash one finds:[8] "[The verse] *It was on the eighth day* should have been at the beginning of Leviticus; why then was it written here [in Lev. 9:1]? Because there is no chronological order in [the narrative of] the Torah."[9] According to this reading, [*The Eternal*] *called Moses* (Lev. 1:1) should be after *the Glory of the Eternal appeared there before the entire nation* (Lev. 9:23), since Moses was not allowed to enter the cloud without permission. Rather, God would call him, and then he would enter the cloud, as it was at Mount Sinai: *On the seventh day He called to Moses from the cloud* (Ex. 24:16), and it says *Moses entered into the cloud* (Ex. 24:18). And when the cloud no longer covered the entire tent, it is written, *When Moses came into the tent* (Num. 7:89) since there he entered without being called °(all this is from the commentary of Ramban).[10] We will discuss this further in Leviticus, God willing.

38. **before the eyes of all the house of Yisrael, in all their journeys** [*le-ʿene kol bet yisraʾel be-khol masʿehem*]: in every journey [*massaʿ*] that they took, the cloud would rest at the place they encamped. Their place of encampment is also called *massaʿ*, as in *and he went on to his resting places* [*le-massaʿav*] °(Gen. 13:3), and *these are the deployments* [*masʿe*] °(Num. 33:1), since they would resume their journeys from each place of encampment; as such, they are all referred to as *massaʿot* °(Rashi). It is thus translated in German as *Zügen*, which includes the meaning of encampment.

[Mendelssohn's Epilogue]
This is the end of the book of the redemption from Egypt, the giving of the Torah, and the making of the Tabernacle, its implements, and the priestly vestments. In scattered references in the Talmud and *midrashim*, our Sages noted the purpose of the objects and the crafts that were commanded with regard to the Tabernacle: what was intended by them and what they alluded to, and why these venerable things were made according to a certain measurement or shape and not another. One finds in Yalqut Shimʿoni to Exodus °(§ 419): "R. Nehemia would say: the tent of meeting that Moses made in the desert corresponded to the Account of Creation. The strips [that covered the Tabernacle] corresponded to heaven and earth, the laver and its stand corresponded to the six days of creation, the altar of the burned offering corresponded to all the cattle, the altar of incense corresponded to all the spices, the *menorah* [lampstand] corresponded to the sun and the moon, [and] its seven lamps corresponded to the seven planets

8. Ecc. R. to 1:12.

9. On the rabbinic notion of the literary chronology of Scripture, see the *Beʾur* to Ex. 32:13 and notes.

10. Mendelssohn combined Ramban's comments on Ex. 40:2 and 40:34–35 and edited both quite substantially, rearranging the material and inserting his own comments.

that serve the world, which are s-ṣ-m, ḥ-n-k-l."[11] In the Talmud they said "[the color] blue [*tekhelet*] was similar to [that of] the ocean, etc."[12] Among later scholars, the greatest have also followed this path, including Maimonides in *Pirqe ha-Haṣlaḥah*,[13] Ibn Ezra, Ramban, R. Moses Alshekh, Abarbanel, and Ralbag. All of them delved deeply in order to speak about the meaning of the building and the things produced for it, each one proceeding in his own manner.

As for us, we have maintained the principle that we set for ourselves as the intended purpose of this commentary, not to deviate from the scriptural *peshaṭ*. This is what Rashi did with regard to the Tabernacle and its implements: he eschewed the hidden allusions and secrets contained in them, and explained only the *peshaṭ* apparent in the words of our Sages and from consideration and scrutiny of the words of God. Besides, the investigation into those speculative matters is exceedingly lengthy and broad, and we committed ourselves to brevity and as much concision as possible so as not to burden the individual reading the Torah and to weary him with investigations that are not germane to the understanding of Scripture. If your soul desires those speculative matters, you may seek them from the books of the great writers we have mentioned, and *you will find tranquility* (Jer. 6:16). Do not be astonished when you notice that their words do not follow one approach, with one [scholar] looking to the natural sciences while another ascends the pathways of esoteric wisdom; or one stating that the matters hint at the celestial spheres and the configuration of the stars, while another that they indicate the human limbs, and a third one understands from these matters sublime spiritual things *that no eye has seen* (Isa. 64:3). Do not rebuff the words of one [or another] of these scholars because of such divergence, and heed the distinction between divergence and contradiction that we noted in the introduction to this work[14] and in the introduction to Exodus 21. For it is possible that their words can *all of them* [*be*] *at once correct* (Ps. 19:10) even if they differ and diverge, as long as there is no contradiction in the matter. It is known, with regard to the ways and attributes of Divine Wisdom, that one action may be aimed at many objectives that are different and divergent in some aspect but

11. The planets were: s[habbetai] (Saturn), ṣ[edeq] (Jupiter), m[adim] (Mars), ḥ[amah] (Sun), n[ogah] (Venus), k[okhav] (Mercury), and l[evanah] (Moon).

12. Sot. 17a and elsewhere: "[The color] blue [*tekhelet*] was similar to [that of] the ocean, the ocean to that of the sky, and the sky to that of the throne of glory." Although this Talmudic passage referred specifically to the blue of the fringes [*ṣiṣit*] in Num. 15:38, it was also used in the Tabernacle. Mendelssohn, in any event, was interested in the broader notion of how classical sources interpreted biblical particulars.

13. *Pirqe ha-Haṣlaḥah* opened with an interpretation of some of the features of the Tabernacle as parables for the service of the heart and soul in their quest to draw close to God. Although modern scholars have expressed skepticism regarding the authorship of this text, early modern Jewish writers had no reason to question its Maimonidean provenance; it was printed with Maimonides' responsa in *Pe'er ha-Dor* (Amsterdam, 1765), 33a–35b.

14. *Or li-Netivah*, section II, pp. 293–94 above.

substantively in agreement.[15] We understand through our sense-perception the wonders of creation, that the wisdom of the *most perfect in knowledge* (Job 37:16) incorporates countless intentions and objectives with one deed; and the more a person continues to reflect upon God's creations, the more he will come to understand its many intended meanings. And as this is true of the things [divinely] formed and the nature of creation, why should we deny it with regard to the Torah and the sanctuary service? Isn't it all *given from one Shepherd* and going to one place (Ecc. 12:11, 3:20)?

Since we have been nonetheless permitted to reflect upon the purposes of these particular endeavors and to add to them, each according to his ability, we too—having completed our explication of Scripture according to their *peshaṭ*—will add one aspect to the words of the outstanding scholars mentioned above with regard to the purpose of the Tabernacle and the crafts commanded in [its construction]. It may be that none of those writers mentioned it due to its simplicity and its obvious and superficial nature.

When *God chose the people close to Him to be His special people among all the nations* (Deut. 7:6, Ps. 148:14), Divine Wisdom understood that when they will assemble on their land as a political society, they would seek many precise sciences and different crafts with regard to *all the work of masters and clever artisans* (Ex. 35:35).[16] It is well known that without them society cannot exist and its matters cannot be properly arranged, even if it is also true that their excess *is but a deficiency* (Prov. 11:24). If you reflect upon all the different kinds of craftwork and *work of masters and clever artisans*, you will find that they are to be divided into the following kinds: (1) some are necessary, without which a man cannot *become a* contented *living being* [Gen. 2:7], like those labors needed for food and clothing and shelter and so forth; these are referred to as necessary crafts; (2) some are useful and purposeful, whether for the state as a whole and the betterment of society or its parts, as for example the construction of roads and bridges, metal-work and the tools made from them, the art of writing, and so forth; these are called useful crafts; (3) and there are those that bring pleasure and delight to a man's life without any other purpose, as for example the craft of dying, embroidery and weaving, drawing, stone-carving, overlaying gold, and similar things; these are referred to as ornamental crafts. Sometimes these are merely auxiliary crafts by means of which things that are needed and useful for people are made beautiful in order to make them more appealing and agreeable and pleasant to the soul. But sometimes these are primary crafts that serve no need or purpose except pleasure and delight alone, as for example instrumental music, dance, painting, and the like.

15. See *ʿIqqarim* I:25.

16. Mendelssohn had translated the biblical phrase as *alle Werke des Meisters und sinnreichen Künstlers*.

In all these crafts there is a theoretical element and an applied element. The theoretical element is built upon the deepest foundations of the sciences—natural science, mathematics, geometry, and mechanics—regarding which there are many analytic studies and marvelous devices. One who understands them will be astonished and in awe at the sophistication of the First Cause and the spirit of His wisdom. The applied element is sometimes perfected with physical and manual dexterity alone, and all that is needed is handiwork and artistic skill; these are crafts or skilled labor. For the most part, once [these crafts] have emerged and become widespread, they are entrusted [even] to lesser men, but only if they possessed the requisite manual perfection. In other instances, they will require mental activity, however much or little, which are referred to as *the work of masters and clever artisans* (Ex. 35:35), and with these, even the applied element is entrusted to *wise artists who* have *wise spirit* (Ex. 28:3). Among some of [these crafts], only mental acumen and subtlety of thought need to have been perfected, without need for manual dexterity, such as the art of logic and poetry, or the guidance of a ship, a nation, and a home, or mathematics, medicine, and the like. In truth, however, these [latter] are not referred to in Hebrew as a craft [*melaʾkhah*], since there is no manual artistry and physical dexterity. You will notice that such crafts are not prohibited on Shabbat, since in Hebrew these are called *ḥokhmah* [wisdom] and not *melaʾkhah*.[17] But recent translators [of the Bible] have conformed to the [European] vernaculars that incorporate in one word ʿ(*ars*, *Kunst*) all methodical activities by means of which an action attains a desired aim, whether or not it includes physical activity. They included in the definition of wisdom the knowledge of those methodical activities and their interconnectedness, and how we use them to attain the desired aim, which is to say their theoretical element. But the distinctions of our holy language do not accord with them.[18]

All these crafts are praiseworthy and beneficial for a nation's well-being, as long as they do not exceed the bounds of equilibrium and the middle way and tend destructively to excess. Those bounds are not the same for every national group, but vary according to the nation's well-being, the size of its population, the bounty of the land, and its relationship with the surrounding nations, as is well known. Early [in a nation's development] it is fitting to develop nothing but necessary crafts, and when it grows and prospers in its endeavors it can also concern itself with useful crafts and turn also to crafts that are ornamental and pleasing, depending on the situation. In all these stages, excess is dangerous

17. Mendelssohn maintained this distinction by translating *melaʾkhah* as *Arbeit* (e.g., Ex. 20:9), *Kunstarbeit* (Ex. 12:16), *Handwerkearbeit* (Ex. 31:14), whereas *ḥokhmah* was translated as *Weisheit*.

18. Mendelssohn's critique was directed at Johann David Michaelis' *Deutsche Uebersetzung des Alten Testaments*, whose Exodus volume appeared in 1771. Michaelis blurred the distinction Mendelssohn was positing here by rendering *ḥokhmah* as *Geschicklichkeit* or *Kunst*; see his translation of Ex. 31:6, 36:1–2.

and harmful, but excess and the overstepping of bounds with regard to crafts that are ornamental and pleasing quickly ruins and destroys the political weal and *has felled many victims* (Prov. 7:26). This is because it brings about love of pleasures; it weakens the body with the powerful urge to acquire things and the coveting of wealth and things that pamper and indulge. It gives rise to *men's envy of each other* (Ecc. 4:4) and separates those close-of-heart; it stirs up conflict among inhabitants of the land and strife and discord between an individual and his immediate neighbor. As a result, order is disrupted and the nation becomes unruly and corrupted to the extent that there is almost no cure for its malady.[19]

As such, it is possible to say that just as God commanded His nation to consecrate the first-fruits of their wombs, their land, and their livestock for his Great Name—and the Sages said that there is nothing whose first-fruits are not consecrated to heaven[20]—He also wanted them to dedicate the first-fruits of their thoughts and designs and all their artistic skills that concern the operation of the state and society, and to consecrate them to His service. He wanted them to use these [thoughts and skills] for divine worship in the Tabernacle, its implements, and the clothing worn by its functionaries. In this way all their endeavors would be sanctified toward heaven, for they would thus remember God in all their activities, and they would not turn aside to seek excess and to pursue vain things, for a craft that was not related to the Tabernacle was not considered labor,[21] and it is not fitting that one of Israel who serves God should engage in such things and preoccupy his thoughts with its vanities.

The reason that there is no explicit command from God indicating what is permissible and prohibited to them [with regard to these crafts] is that God did not want the matter to rest upon a particular measure or one circumscribed stage [of development],[22] rather allowing it to change with the times and vary with circumstances. And when the [Israelites] come to their land *and live in safety from all their enemies around them* (Deut. 12:10) and become increasingly successful and wealthy, they will concomitantly strive to take up various sci-

19. Cf. his Commentary (Meaning) on Ecc. 4:4. Mendelssohn's comments addressed the eighteenth-century debate over luxuries, which turned on the relationship between morality and political economy. Some thinkers endorsed luxuries for their economic benefits. Hume, for example, thought the production of luxuries would help create a "middling rank" of men. Others endorsed luxuries for their civilizing impact, as with Bernard Mandeville's assertion that "Luxury and Politeness ever grew up together." On the other hand, Rousseau asserted that luxury had only deleterious consequences, since it impoverished the many and depopulated the state. Mendelssohn took a middle position by accepting Rousseau's strictures about luxury having the potential to unravel the fabric of society, but he argued that such evils were not universally manifest and were dependent upon the circumstances of a particular society. Cf. also his passing comment on "excessive luxury [*überhand genommene Üppigkeit*]" in *Jerusalem*, *JubA,* 8:112; Arkush, *Jerusalem*, 43.

20. The rabbinic source cited here is unknown, and Mendelssohn appears to have offered a broad articulation of the rabbinic perspective.

21. That is, it was not classified as one of the categories of labor prohibited on the Sabbath.

22. Or: category, class.

ences and crafts without eschewing the ornamental crafts, as they deem proper. You see that until the days of Solomon *the ark of God rested in the tent* (2 Sam. 7:2), and when *the kingdom was secured in the hands* of this wise king (1 Kgs. 2:46), *Judah and Israel were as numerous as the sands of the sea* (ibid., 4:20) *dwelling safely from Dan to Be'er-Sheva, every man under his vine and under his fig tree* (ibid., 5:5) *with silver and gold as plentiful in Jerusalem as stones, and cedars as plentiful as sycamores in the Shefelah* (2 Chron. 1:15)—[only] then did God command them *to build a house in his Name* (ibid., 1:18). The king also built *a royal palace for himself* (ibid.) with magnificent buildings embellished with all manner of glory and majesty; *he made two hundred shields*, *three hundred bucklers of gold*, *and a large throne of ivory* (1 Kgs. 10:16–18); and *the drinking cups and the utensils of the House of the Forest of Lebanon were of refined gold* (ibid., 10:21). He built ships to *bring from Ofir almug-wood and precious stones*, and from them *he made supports for the House of the Eternal and for the royal palace, and harps and lyres for the musicians* (ibid., 10:12). You see how far things developed even in those days; would that they not exceed this [appropriate] measure, for it was then related to and arrayed with the national success and felicity. But afterward the love of pleasure and beautification grew with the king and nation; they tended to excess, and what happened next is known from the prophetic books.

The principle is that with regard to such matters that are apt to change according to time and circumstance, there is no delineation of a set boundary and a delimitation of man *saying: "you may come so far"* (Job 38:11), for what would delimit something that is enduring and ever-present? How could one apportion something that has no fixed allocation? Rather, the more correct approach to guard oneself from that trap is what the Sages wrote: "let all your deeds be for the sake of heaven."[23] With this, an individual sets his mind to distinguish between good and bad, between what is beneficial and harmful, and he will not lust after *the arrogance of his* lustful *heart, adding excess to his thirst* (Deut. 29:18).[24] For this reason God did not delineate a boundary for them and did not apportion a limit and fixed amount; rather, He commanded them to conjoin all their deeds and thoughts heavenward, and to consecrate all their firstlings in His service. Blessed be He and his Great Name who *set us apart from the nations* (Lev. 20:24) *and gave us the Torah of Truth, good ordinances and just laws* (Neh. 9:13) in order that our love and fear of Him always be upon us. Amen *selah*.

23. M. Avot 2:12.

24. In his translation of that verse and in the *Be'ur*, Mendelssohn explained that Scripture warned against adding insolently to one's natural desires without need.

SELECTIONS FROM LEVITICUS, NUMBERS, AND DEUTERONOMY

Leviticus 19:17–18

[In the *Be'ur* to Leviticus 19:17–18, Wessely argued that love and hate, as properties of the soul, were not directly subject to individual volition. These biblical imperatives were thus directed at the heart or mind, exhorting the exercise of rational judgment and the control of one's actions so as to regulate the proclivities of the soul. Wessely thus read verse 18 not as *Love your fellow man as you love yourself* but *Love your fellow man as he is similar to you*, thereby underscoring our shared humanity as the fundamental reason for ethical action. This unusual interpretation was at variance with the German translation and prompted Mendelssohn to add a note that offered his own interpretation.]

19:17 Do not hate your brother in your heart! You can give your fellow man a reprimand °(that is, if he has offended you), but do not bear the offense against him.

18 You shall not avenge, nor bear anger against the children of your people, love your fellow man as you love yourself; I [am], the Eternal.

Commentary

The translator said: All of [Wessely's] words are words of favor and *good understanding for those who do them* (Ps. 111:10), and happy is he who heeds his admonishment. But the straightforward sense of the verses does not convey those meanings, and to my mind, this is what Scripture meant:

[17.] **do not hate your brother in your heart** [*lo tisna et aḥikha bilvavekha*]. Scripture cautions that not only should one refrain from acting hatefully toward his fellow man, [i.e.,] striking him, cursing him, or doing him some wrong, but that one should not even hate him in his heart and in his innermost [being]. We find that God would issue a command even with regard to moral traits, for they too are subject to choice, and it is in the hands of a wise individual to control them

with his understanding, as when He commanded *You shall not have any desire* [*for your fellow man's house*] (Ex. 20:14). °(See what Ibn Ezra wrote in explanation of this *dibbur*, and what he explained in his commentary on that section.) Likewise, He commanded love in some instances, like loving the foreigner and the slave, and in what follows, **love** him **as you love yourself**.

you can give your fellow man a reprimand [*hokheah tokhiah et ʿamitekha*]—if he caused you harm, reprimand him to his face and point out his misdeed; and if he committed an offense against you, **do not bear the offense against him**, preserving it in your heart until you visit it upon him. Rather, reprimand him immediately; perhaps he will apologize or repent and regret [his deed], enabling love to return to your hearts.[1]

[18.] **you shall not avenge** [*lo tiqqom*], doing to him as he did to you, **nor bear anger** [*ve-lo tiṭṭor*] toward his evil with words or thoughts.

love your fellow man as you love yourself [*ve-ʾahavta le-reʿakha kamokha*]—love your brother with the very attributes and ways with which you love yourself. Scripture is not speaking of the quantity of love, but of its quality. In order to understand this one must preface it by pointing out that moral traits have [both] quality and quantity. Take for example love. While one might love even something inanimate, the quality of love is not equal with regard to all things: one would not love his animal the way he loves his son, and he would not love his possessions and treasures the way he loves his wife; he would not even love his silver and gold as he would his vine and fig tree, and so forth. Even when the quality of the love is the same, there is a distinction in the quantity, namely the [relative] intensity or weakness. One might love his young son more than his grown one, or his silver goblet more than his other implements, or his horse more than his donkey, and so forth. And whenever one cannot do well by two things he loves, he gives preference to the one that is more beloved, and this is the benefit of the quantity and the excellence of love.

As such, God commands us to love our fellow man in all the ways that we would love ourselves, which is the love that is qualitatively the most sublime. And in any event, [we are commanded] not to allow our true love for ourselves to run counter to our love for the other with regard to justice and integrity. We are obligated to do for others everything we would do for our own benefit, even without denying the difference in strength and weakness. And if, according to what is just and right, we cannot do well by another without unduly harming ourselves, then we should give priority to love of self, as the Sages said "your life

1. This echoed the commentary of Ramban.

has precedence over the life of your friend."[2] The general principle here is that the Torah does not address itself to the quantity of love, since [the commandment of such a distinction] would be necessary only when presented with a clash wherein one cannot fulfill both [imperatives]. Rather, [the Torah addresses itself] to the quality of love when there is no clash between two beloved things. In that case, [the Torah commands you to] love your fellow man as you love yourself: do good to your fellow man in all the beneficial ways that you favor yourself. This is not to be done for the benefit of the one granting the love or his pleasure, as is the case when one loves his possessions and treasures, but for the purpose and benefit of the one receiving the love, just as one would love oneself.[3]

2. Sifra, *Be-Har*, 5:3; B.M. 62a.

3. Cf. Mendelssohn's "Rhapsody or Additions to the Letters on Sentiments in Philosophical Writings" in *PW*, 151–52; and *Jerusalem*, *JubA*, 8:116–17, Arkush, *Jerusalem*, 47–48.

Leviticus 26:1

[Leviticus 26 followed a chapter that dealt mainly with issues pertaining to land use and ownership, and preceded a section regarding the blessings and punishments that Israel would earn in accord with its fealty to the Torah. The opening verse of this chapter repeated earlier warnings against idolatry.]

26:1 Make no idols for yourselves or set up any image or any monument, and allow no stone with pictorial-script [*Bilderschrift*] in your land for worship; for I am the Eternal your God.

Commentary

1. **stone with pictorial-script** [*ve-ʾeven maskit*]: The translator said: [In his *Sefer ha-Shorashim*] s.v. *shin–khaf–heh*, Radaq explained that [the word *maskit*] refers to a drawing, [since the root connotes] looking, and one would look at a drawn figure. It would appear that the stone [referred to in our verse] was one upon which they etched different figures called *Hieroglyphen* or *Bilderschrift*, which I addressed with regard to the *ḥarṭumme miṣrayim* (Ex. 7:11).[1] Those figures

1. In his translation of Ex. 7:11, Mendelssohn rendered *ḥarṭumme miṣrayim* (often translated "the magicians of Egypt") as *Bilderschriftkundigen*, and inserted a parenthetical note in the translation itself: "*Bilderschrift* is a kind of writing in which the Egyptian priests presented their crafts and secret teachings. One who understood these was a sage among them, and knew many hidden crafts." Dubno elaborated on this in the *Beʾur* to the word *ḥarṭumme* in Gen. 41:8: "The German translator agreed with a scholar who explained that this word was derived from the word *ḥereṭ* . . . namely, the tool [i.e., a stylus] with which one makes engravings on a hard object; and the word was extended to the engraver [himself]. It is known that when the art of writing began, all matters and ideas were recorded by means of pictures and engravings called *Hieroglyphen* or *Bilderschrift* [pictorial-script]. That form of writing was extant among the Egyptians, and with it, their priests and learned men concealed their knowledge of the natural world and [their] manipulations and acts of magic from the multitude, since only the priests and the leaders of the people understood it. . . . As such, it is possible that an individual who understands those pictures and engravings and knows how to utilize them and interpret them properly is called a *ḥarṭum*; they were the learned men, the magicians, and the interpreters of dreams in Egypt."

were a kind of script for their priests and learned men in which they inscribed matters that they wanted to keep from the rest of the nation. In order to make the multitude revere them, they said that they were sublime figures that were worthy of obeisance and worship, and there are remnants of those stones to this day. God forbids us to set up these figures in our land even for adornment or relic for the reason that the commentator [i.e., Wessely] goes on to mention.[2]

Mendelssohn's source for the notion that *ḥarṭummim* were masters of hieroglyphic engravings appeared to be the seventeenth-century English Hebraist Nicholas Fuller and his *Miscellaneorum Theologicorum* (Strasbourg, 1650), book V, ch. XI, pp. 646–47. Fuller's philological note was cited by Simon Patrick (1626–1707) and David Mill (1692–1756), whose writings were then included in the German anthology of English commentaries to Scripture, *Die Heilige Schrift des Alten und Neuen Testaments* (Leipzig, 1749–70) edited by Romanus Teller.

2. Wessely had commented that such figures draw one to vain thoughts and idolatry.

Leviticus 26:38–39

[After describing the blessings that would result from Israel's obedience to God's commandments, Leviticus 26:14–45 offered a vivid and lengthy list of the calamities that would befall the nation if it turned its back on God.]

26:38 You will perish among the nations; the land of your enemies shall devour you.

39 Those remaining among you will waste away on account of their own sin in the land of your enemies; so too they will waste away partly on account of the sin of their parents.

Commentary

39. **so too they will waste away partly on account of the sin of their parents** [*ve-ʾaf ba-ʿavonot avotam ittam yimmaqqu*]: The translator said: God forbid that one should ascribe a transgression to an individual as if he had sinned, even though he had not. Onqelos' translation, like the approach taken by Rashi, rendered the verse "even on account of the sins of their fathers' evil [deeds] to which they adhere, they will wither away."[1] This is not the opinion of the scribe who applied the cantillation marks, since he conjoined the word *ittam* with *yimmaqqu*, while according to Rashi, he should have connected it to the preceding [words].[2]

I will tell you my opinion on this matter. There is punishment that is miraculous, namely the evils that only befall an individual in an extraordinary manner above the bounds of nature. However, once this comes about, the evil will attach

1. This was based on Sifra, *Be-Ḥuqqotai* 2:8 and San. 27b, which stated that children were punished for their parents' misdeeds only when they perpetuated them.

2. Rashi's lemma read *ba-ʿavonot avotam ittam*, a phrasing that disregarded the *ṭeʿamim* and disconnected the word *ittam* from the word *yimmaqqu*; this allowed for a reading along the lines of "when their fathers' sins are with them." See below.

to the individual and will endure for his children after him in a natural manner. It will not detach from his descendants unless God should favor them by removing it in a miraculous manner.

Consider, for example, Israel's exile from their land, which did not happen by natural means but by the will of God alone. However, once we had been exiled the children born to us also suffer the yoke of the exile, but naturally. And thus, when in the land of Israel *the skies become like iron and the earth like copper* (Lev. 26:19) this occurs in a miraculous manner, since it is not in the nature of the chosen land to be like this. But once this evil arrives on account of Israel's transgression, then it is natural that people die of starvation, and even small children who did not sin and *did not know their right hand from their left* (Jon. 4:11) will die, unless God wishes to preserve them in some wondrous manner. As such, these evils originated as a supernatural punishment, brought upon them by God only on account of widespread rebellion; but they ended up a natural punishment, which God would not lift from the children of those originally punished or their descendants unless they were particularly worthy of it.

Now, God promised Israel that He would not punish the children with a supernatural punishment on account of their fathers' transgression, and this is indicated by [the scriptural verse] *Fathers shall not be put to death for children*, etc. (Deut. 24:16). Nevertheless, it is possible to say *Our fathers sinned and are no more; and we must bear their guilt* °(Lam. 5:7) for our merit is not sufficient for God to redeem us in a wondrous manner and we are miserable in a bitter exile on account of the sins of our forefathers. This is also [suggested by] the wording of Scripture here, **so too they will waste away partly on account of the sin of their parents**, with the precise use of the word *ittam* and its conjunction with *yimmaqqu*: they are punished with their forefathers and suffer with them and on account of them, since the punishment continues and affects them in any event.

Numbers 15:30–31

[Numbers 15:27–30 addressed itself to the unwitting or inadvertent transgressions of an individual and the means of expiation. By contrast, verses 30–31 turned to the case of one who has transgressed willfully and even brazenly against God.]

15:30 But if a person, whether a native or foreigner, commits a crime with irreverence, that one has blasphemed the Eternal; and that same person shall be cut off from his nation.

31 For that one has, with contempt for the word of the Eternal, transgressed His commandment; such a person will be cut off—the guilt lies in him.

Commentary

31. The translator said: we only wish to note the meaning of the word [*ḳaret*] and its metaphorical reference, in accordance with the approach taken by the commentator on Leviticus [i.e., Wessely] at the beginning of chapter 21, q.v. One who has reflected upon moral traits knows that souls have no greater pleasure than love, this being the desire for fellowship and friendship and an intimate bond with other souls; and all of man's yearnings are directed at this love, which is the product and goal of them all. Sometimes [the soul] is drawn to one of lesser and inferior stature, and this is called graciousness and loving-kindness; sometimes [it is drawn] to things of similar stature, and that is called fraternity and fellowship; and sometimes a person longs to cleave to an essence that is more glorious and exalted than himself, and then he can only approach it, as it says *Keeping myself close to God—this is my greatest good* °(Ps. 73:28).[1] [Love] is the strongest and most sublime connection among souls that an embodied

1. The printed text referred mistakenly to Ps. 71.

being can attain, for a soul cannot be connected with another soul except with the bonds of love. The true good and the ultimate blessedness is to adhere and be embraced and conjoined in the fellowship of supernal souls and to *delight in love* (Prov. 7:18). The converse of this is the isolation of the soul and its being forsaken, solitary, and bereft of love, fraternity, and fellowship. This is the ultimate of all evils, of which there is no worse affliction or suffering—this is the punishment of the destruction of the soul, as much as we can understand of it. From this you can understand the notion of being "gathered to one's people" or "to one's forefathers" that is invoked with the death of the righteous,[2] and also the notion of a soul being cut off in the world to come, which is the punishment of one who **commits a crime with irreverence**. The meaning is that they would be detached from the bonds of love and intimacy, and that the defiant soul would have no share in the world of souls; [that soul] would not be gathered or drawn together in their assembly, nor delight in the spiritual pleasures—not with graciousness, or fellowship, or closeness. Rather, [the soul] would remain isolated and forsaken, and this would be for it a fitting punishment: because of its **contempt** for drawing close to God and **His commandment**—which is all love and fraternity—**he transgressed**; therefore **such a person will be cut off—the guilt lies in him**.[3]

2. See, e.g., Gen. 25:8, 35:29, 49:33, Num. 20:24.

3. Cf. the *Be'ur* to Gen. 2:18; the comment reflected Mendelssohn's commitment to sociability as a fundamental human value.

Numbers 15:37–40

[This section contained the commandment to attach *ṣiṣit* (fringes) to one's garment.]

15:37 The Eternal spoke further to Moshe as follows:

38 Speak with the children of Yisrael and say to them: they should, with all their descendants, make visible-threads on the corners of their garments; and to this visible-thread attach a string of dark blue wool.

39 These should be for you a visible-thread, [so] that you see them and you remember all the commandments of the Eternal, and you keep them; [so as] not to wander after your heart and eyes that lead you astray.

40 You will thereby be mindful of My commandments to keep them; and you will be holy to your God.

Commentary

39. **and you remember all the commandments of the Eternal** [*u-zekhartem et kol miṣvot adonai*]: The translator said: *peshaṭ* commentators ranged here and there to explain how the [Israelites] would remember all the commandments by seeing the *ṣiṣit* [visible threads] and I will set forth a notion that they did not mention. I already informed you about the manner of the ancient nations °(that did not yet know the art of writing) to engrave figures, images, and different forms, each form denoting some complete matter regarding which they wanted to inform their children after them.[1] The learned men expert in the

1. See the *Be'ur* to Lev. 26:1, and n. 1. Mendelssohn's reference to forms that denoted a "complete matter" would appear to be based on a notion advanced by the German Jesuit Athanasius

tales of the chronicles knew the meaning of each and every form, and as we said in our commentary, this included the Egyptians knowledgeable in hieroglyphics [*ḥarṭumme miṣrayim*] and learned men who knew how to interpret those forms and to make known what was intended by them. Initially, those forms were nothing but written signs that referred to something, like the letters of the alphabet and the words that we employ that have no intrinsic but only semiotic meaning.[2] However, with the passing of days and the degeneration of the times, these individuals knowledgeable in hieroglyphics deceived the multitude with corrupt ideas and false words and said that these forms contained intrinsic meaning and attributed to them special properties and false effects.[3] From this stemmed the error of the idols and the talismans that lead most people astray on crooked paths and repugnant deeds, as is well known, with the exception of the holy patriarchs and their children whom God singled out to be His specially possessed nation and gave them Torah and commandments to safeguard them from those repugnant things.

Now, some peoples made scripted signs by means of strings of different colors and knots in them, and according to the signs indicated by the colors and the number of knots, they knew all the ancient narratives. And this was related by seafaring shipmen, that when they conquered the lands of the new world called *Amerika*, they found in the royal courts of the southern part called *Peru* closed chests full of colored strings with knots of varying numbers, and *they did not know what they were* (Zech. 4:5). But the inhabitants of that country told them that they were signs regarding the tales of their chronicles of ancient origin, and that according to the number of the knots and hues of color they knew everything correctly.[4]

Kircher (c. 1601–80) that hieroglyphics were a sophisticated and even superior form of expression, designed to communicate self-contained and complete ideas synchronously.

2. *en bahem hora'ah 'aṣmit ki im hora'ah simanit levad*.

3. The notion that the hieroglyphics contained secret if not occult teachings, and that they were used as a self-serving tool in the hands of scholars or priests, was advanced by a number of seventeenth-century European writers. In the eighteenth century, this notion was challenged by William Warburton in *The Divine Legation of Moses* (London, 1738–41) in which he argued that such pictographs were simply a primitive form of communication. Mendelssohn was averse to the underlying progressivist assumption popular among Enlightenment thinkers, and thus favored the earlier view on hieroglyphics.

4. Mendelssohn was referring to the Incas and their knotted-string devices known as *khipu* (or: *quipu*). With the sixteenth-century conquest of the Incan empire, Spanish officials and churchmen discovered that the Incas had no alphabetic script but rather intricate bundles of knotted and colored strings that they used for record keeping and other administrative functions. Although colonial writers varied in their understanding of the *khipu* as a mode of communication, some suggested that the *khipu* also served to transmit information regarding laws, rituals, and narrative chronicles. (Recent scholarship has eschewed the notion that the *khipu* functioned as a mnemonic system and has focused on the semiotic nature of these knotted strings, i.e., the *khipu* as a form of "writing" formed by a non-phonological system of signs.) Mendelssohn knew about the *khipu* from two widely circulated accounts: Joseph Acosta, *Historia natural y moral de las*

God, blessed be He, who set us apart from those who go astray, forbade us those graven images and figures that confuse and confound people's thinking. He gave us Torah and commandments to purify our hearts from the impurity of idolatry and to constantly arouse us by means of distinctive actions and deeds to the cornerstones and foundations of true belief. He commanded us to make symbols and mnemonic signs[5] pertaining to this [belief] with our bodies and our homes and everything that is perceptible and sentient to us, in order that those sublime things will never be removed from before our eyes. These include the precept of circumcision and the precept of *mezuzah* on the entranceways to our homes and courtyards. He commanded us to place the sign of *ṭefilin* on our heads and our left arms, and the precept of *ṣiṣit* with our clothing in order that we remember it every time we look at them. It thus appears that with the precept of *ṣiṣit*, the second manner of remembering is used, one that was customary with some of the ancients, namely the use of color and hue and the amount of knots and strings.

Indios (Seville, 1590), and Garcilasso de la Vega, *Commentarios Reales de los Incas* (Lisbon, 1609). Both books went through multiple printings and were translated into French and English in the seventeenth century; Acosta's book was also translated into German.

5. *simane zekhirah*.

Numbers 20:12

[Numbers 20 opened with the death of Miriam and the people's complaint about the lack of drinking water. Moses and Aaron were instructed by God to provide for the Israelites by means of a rock that would yield water. Moses spoke harshly to the assembled people, and then struck the rock twice; water was duly provided, but God then lashed out at Moses and Aaron.]

20:12 The Eternal, however, spoke with Mosheh and Aharon: "because you did not have faith in Me to sanctify Me before the eyes of the children of Yisrael; therefore, you shall not bring this people into the land that I have determined to give them."

Commentary

12. **because you did not have faith in Me to sanctify Me** [*yaʿan lo heʾemantem bi le-haqdisheni*]: The translator said: since there are so many opinions regarding this case of strife and what may have been the sin of these holy individuals, I too will relate what appears, in my humble opinion, to be the scriptural *peshaṭ*. The sanctification of God demands that His devoted servants be courageous, overcoming all natural sentiments and turbulence of the soul, doing His will without fear or alarm, without despondence or anger, whatever accidents of nature may befall them; insofar as they are engaged in the service of God, *they should not fear when the earth* and everything in it *totters* (Ps. 46:3). In this vein Moses said to Aaron, *through those who draw near to me, I will be sanctified and glorified in the presence of the entire nation* °(Lev. 10:3): when you see your sons die and you do not turn from the service of God for even a moment—by this means you sanctify God in public and display His glory before the entire nation. Similarly, Scripture says *you must thus not make any incisions with regard to a dead person, and shave no bald patch between the eyes. For you are a holy nation to the Eternal your God* °(Deut. 14:1[–2]), for this is the sanctification of God—that His

servants should not mourn excessively when someone dies, or when some other accident or injury befalls them.[1] So too [God] commanded the priests, who were closer to Him than the Israelites, to curtail their mourning for the deceased.[2]

[In our case,] we see that Moses and Aaron feared those who had mustered and fled from them to the opening of the tent of meeting where they fell on their faces, for their strength left them[3] until God's majesty revealed itself and instructed him to return and to gather the congregation. Therefore [God] said "since your faith in Me was not strong enough to display My holiness and majesty before the eyes of the children of Israel, to stand your ground among those who converged upon you, without fear and faint-heartedness regardless of what the multitude will do. But servants of God do not fear *their din and revelry* (Isa. 4:14) and will not move from their station. You are thus not prepared to be the leaders of this assembly, and to fight the great and awesome wars on their behalf, and to bear their *troubles and burdens* (Deut. 1:12); for this demands a brave man with self-control and a heart of a lion who *will not be dismayed* by anything (Isa. 31:4)."

But in another scriptural verse [referring back to this incident with Moses,] God said *for you went against Me* (Deut. 32:51).[4] [This can be understood] by way of what the Sages taught, that with those closest to Him, God is exacting down to a hairbreadth;[5] for with regard to those holy individuals, even the smallest shortcoming in the sanctification of God is considered a sacrilege. Blessed is he to whom the Eternal ascribes a transgression like this![6]

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1. Mendelssohn's phrasing echoed Ecc. 2:14, 9:11.

2. See Lev. 21:1–6, 10–12, which established funerary restrictions on the priesthood.

3. See the *Be'ur* to Num. 20:6, where Moses and Aaron first reacted to the people's complaints regarding the water and more generally about being taken from Egypt: "*They fell on their faces*—from the excess of anguish and fear, they had no strength left to stand on their feet." In stressing Moses' weakness, Mendelssohn drew upon Tan. *Qoraḥ* [§ 4] with regard to the confrontation with Qoraḥ in Num. 16, where the fact that he fell on his face was taken as a loss of nerve that manifested itself in physical weakness.

4. This verse in Deuteronomy came just as God ordered Moses to ascend Mount Nebo, where he would die without entering the promised land. The verse suggested that Moses would go no further because he had gone against God, and as such, it appeared contrary to the notion that the failure was one of leadership.

5. See B.Q. 50a and elsewhere.

6. See Ps. 32:2.

Deuteronomy 13:2

[Deuteronomy 13 warned Israelites against co-religionists who would lure them to idolatry. This section opened with the case of a prophet who claimed to speak with divine authority in support of his exhortation to worship other gods.]

13:2 If a prophet or dreamer arises among you; and gives you a sign or miracle.

Commentary

2. **a sign or miracle** [*ot o mofet*]: any apprehended notion[1] that indicates the existence of something else is called an *ot* in [biblical] Hebrew, or *siman* in the language of the Sages. It would appear that [the original meaning of] *ot* [is indicated in the verse] *declare the signs* [*ha-ʾotiyyot*] *in advance* °(Isa. 41:23), since a sign usually indicates something that will occur, but before it is apprehended. This is so whether [the sign] is something that follows and is caused by [that occurrence], or whether it is similar to it in some way, and he is thereby roused by that sign to remember what is signified by it, as memory is aroused by things that are similar. This is like the rainbow in a cloud, about which it was said *this shall be a sign* [*ot*] *of the covenant between Me and the earth; when I bring a cloud over the earth, and this bow is visible in clouds; I will remember the covenant*, etc. (Gen. 9:13–15), that is, the memory of the covenant follows from and is caused by the sight of the rainbow. Similarly, when the prophet speaks about some future event, as for example that God will be with us, he will say *Therefore the Eternal* [Himself] *will give you a sign* (Isa. 7:14), namely that the son of the prophet's wife will be called Immanuel ["God is with us"], which was a sign of something that would come about similar to it. And likewise *what is the sign*

1. *ʿinyan musag*, i.e., a notion or matter that is intelligible or perceptible.

that I will go up to the house of the Eternal? °(Isa. 38:22), [i.e.,] an advance [sign] informing him of his ascent.

A miracle [*mofet*] is an action more sublime than the force of nature that compels the soul to believe in the word of he who brings it about and to acknowledge that he is a messenger from God, who has the power and the dominion to do with the natural order as He wills.

As such, sign and miracle are in one respect synonymous, since the miracle is a sign regarding the dispatch of the messenger—a sign, testimony, and proof for everything said in the name of God; and likewise, when a sign is something more wondrous and sublime than nature, it is called a miracle [*mofet*]. But they are distinct in the respect mentioned, that every miracle is a sign, but not every sign is a miracle. [The Sages] said in Sifre "A sign is a miracle, and a miracle is a sign, since the Torah used two terms [to refer to one thing]";[2] they meant that with regard to a certain aspect, sign and miracle have one meaning, namely a wondrous thing that points to some matter and compels one to believe in it.

Therefore, [with regard to our verse] **and gives you a sign or miracle**, it is as if one says "I am the prophet sent to you by God, [instructing you] to participate in that particular idolatry, and this is the sign that He sent me, for tomorrow such and such will happen," or if he does some other wondrous thing in order to make clear that he is sent by the Exalted God. But [He] commanded us not to listen to the words of the prophet, and not to heed his signs and miracles, for it is axiomatic that one who offers a sign or miracle to deny the existence of God and His wisdom, or [to deny] His infinite kindness and His goodness with His creations, contradicts and denies his own words in a complete and absolute contradiction. For it is known that anyone who denies one of God's perfections denies them all. For example, one who states that God's justice and uprightness are not infinite also denies His omnipotence and omniscience. And so with all of them—one cannot acknowledge one of God's perfections and deny the others. This pertains to the Unity of his Great Name, namely that all His perfections are without limitation and are infinite, and they are One with regard to Him and united in absolute unity. How then, can he make clear and bring proof that he is an emissary of the God who rules over all, while he himself denies He who sent him? Therefore, the prophet who says something in the name of God and proffers a sign or miracle—his word must agree with everything that we know with the faculty of reason regarding the essence of the Creator and His attributes. And if not, he is a false prophet, given that he contradicts his own words.

As such, if the sign or miracle is used *to entice you from God and to go and worship other gods* (vv. 6–7), as for example if he says "the Venerable God sent me [to instruct you] to worship Pe'or[3] for he was His partner in the creation of the

2. Sifre, *Ba-Midbar* § 23.

3. See Num. 25:1–9 and Deut. 4:3. This line was taken from Ramban.

world," which contradicts His true nature;[4] or [if he were to say] "you should believe that God is finite, corporeal, or distorts justice" or generally anything that is counter to one of the perfections that are united in Him without distinction and division—he thus contradicts his own words and attests to the fact that he spoke untruth; if so, why would you need to investigate him further, to see whether that miracle is true or not? This is inherently fraudulent, and there is no greater proof [of his deceit] than this, and therefore God said *You should not listen to the words of that prophet* (v. 4).[5]

Now, the commandment that is the subject of this entire section, as Ramban wrote, refers to one who prophesies in favor of idolatrous worship. But one who prophesies in the name of God to change something with regards to the Torah, our Sages expounded [this section to teach][6] that if he came to uproot anything from the Torah, as for example permanently permitting [the consumption of] pig or sexual relations with someone otherwise prohibited, he is to be judged as a false prophet. But if the prophet permits this for a short period of time as a temporary measure, as for example Elijah on the Carmel, we are obligated to listen to him and to heed all that he commanded us to do.

4. Note that Mendelssohn speaks here of an "associate" god (*shuttaf*) with regard to idolatry and false prophecy; cf. the *Be'ur* to Ex. 20:2 and n. 28.

5. In his commentary, Ramban explained that resistance to a call to idolatry was rooted in the Israelite *experience* of the Exodus and the revelation at Sinai; since the Israelites *knew* their God, they also knew of His claim to exclusivity and the rejection of other gods. Mendelssohn, following Maimonides (*Mishneh Torah*, Yesode ha-Torah 8:3), placed exclusive emphasis on the logical impossibility of a prophetic call to idolatry; the self-contradictory nature of this deceit was the very basis upon which to reject him.

6. San. 90a. The remainder of this paragraph was drawn almost verbatim from Ramban's commentary on Deut. 13:4. See also Maimonides' introduction to his Mishnah commentary.

Deuteronomy 17:14–20

[This section of Deuteronomy addresses the question of political governance.]

17:14 When you come into the land that the Eternal your God gives to you, [and] you take it and have it as a possession; and you say "I will place a king over me, as all the peoples around me here do."

15 You may place a king over you, whom the Eternal your God will then choose; you must however choose one of your brothers as king, and must not place over you any foreigner who is not your brother.

16 However, he should not keep too many horses, and not lead the people back to Miṣrayim in order to acquire many horses; for the Eternal has told you that you should never tread that way again.

17 He should also not take too many wives, so that his heart does not deviate; likewise, he should not accumulate silver and gold excessively.

18 When he sits on the throne; he shall produce for himself a copy of this teaching in a book, from that which is kept with the priests from the tribe of Levi.

19 He should have this with him and read from it all his life; with it, he would learn to fear the Eternal his God, to obey exactly all the words of this teaching and this law.

20 That his heart would not raise itself over his brothers, and that he not deviate from the law to the right or to the left; so that he and his descendants may remain long years in power [*Regierung*] in Yisrael.

Commentary

14. **as all the peoples around me here do** [*ke-khol ha-goyim asher sevivotai*]: obedience to a king and his government does not benefit a people, but you will come to envy all the peoples around you.

15. **you may place** [*som tasim*]: Our Sages said: "The Israelites were charged with three commandments upon entering the land," and one of them was "to appoint a king over them."[1] They likewise said in Sifre that **you may place a king over you** [is] a positive commandment.[2] It would appear that this commandment is incumbent upon the prophets, elders, and judges who will judge Israel; that after conquering and settling the land, when they see that the multitude of the Israelites wants a king and imagines that it is a great achievement and benefit *to behold a king in his beauty* and honor (Isa. 33:17)[3] who rules over the nation as he desires, as they see among **all the peoples around** them—that they [i.e., the prophets, elders, and judges] should no longer hold back and oppress the nation under the rule of a government unwanted by them. Rather, *they should give them what they desire* (Ps. 78:29) and place a king over them, for such is the rule of the multitude [*mishpaṭ he-hamon*]:[4] when, in political matters, it sets its mind to bring about something new, it will neither rest nor be at peace nor even thrive until it *realizes its desire* (Prov. 13:19).

And so it was in the days of the prophet Samuel, when they asked for a king. It displeased that prophet, and he prayed to God, who answered him *it is not you that they have rejected, it is Me they have rejected from being king over them* °(1 Sam. 8:7). Nevertheless, [God] said to him *Heed their demand, and appoint a king for them* (ibid., v. 22). This is what appears [to be correct] according to its *peshaṭ* in line with the explanation of the opinion of our Sages on this [verse], that the appointment of a king is a positive commandment, even though requesting it is considered rebellious.

whom the Eternal your God will then choose [*asher yivḥar adonai elohekha bo*]: by means of the prophet or the *urim ve-tumim*.[5] If so, what is the meaning of **and you must not place over you any foreigner**—surely God would not choose a foreigner? My opinion[6] according to the *peshaṭ* is that the meaning of **will then choose** is that anyone who rules over nations receives [the authority to rule]

1. San. 20b.
2. Sifre § 156.
3. To the verse in Isaiah, Mendelssohn adds the word *viqaro*, an allusion to Esth. 6:6, 9.
4. This served as an ironic juxtaposition to the *mishpaṭ ha-melekh* [the rules governing the king] of 1 Sam. 8:9–17.
5. Ibn Ezra.
6. The use of the first person is Ramban's.

from God, as that which is written, *the Most High is sovereign over the realm of man and He gives it to whom he wishes* (Dan. 4:29). And so the [Sages] said: "Even a supervisor of a well is appointed from heaven."[7] [The verse beginning with] **you may place a king over you** is thus stating that whoever is decreed by heaven—he is to rule, even if he be *from the smallest of the tribes of Israel and from the least of its clans* (1 Sam. 9:21); but you may never have **any foreigner** to rule over you. Likewise, according to the *peshaṭ*, *to the place that the Eternal your God will choose* (Deut. 14:25) means wherever they will build the sanctuary of God, for it is all from the will of God °(Ramban).

and must not [*lo tukhal*]: you are not permitted, and so the translation of Onqelos, "you have no permission."[8] It is possible that it means what the words imply, that they have no ability [to do so], for even if they choose a foreigner, he would not have monarchial authority [*mishpaṭ ha-melukhah*].

16. **however, he should not keep too many horses** [*raq loʾ yarbeh lo susim*]: for his chariots, so that he not *raise his heart over his brothers* [below, v. 20]; and similarly, [he should not keep too many horses] for the purposes of war, lest he rely too much on his chariot and riders, and engage in too many needless wars.[9]

and [he should] not lead the people back to Miṣrayim in order to acquire many horses [*ve-lo yashiv et ha-ʿam miṣraymah le-maʿan harbot sus*]: this is a negative prohibition in itself, but it is related to the reason for the preceding [prohibition], for at that time horses were brought from Egypt, as is borne out in the words of Solomon, *a chariot imported from Egypt* (1 Kgs. 10:29). In order to procure many horses [the king] would compel the nation to sin by returning to Egypt. [The issue here] is clear: God redeemed them from there, and their return would profane His name °(Ibn Ezra).

you should never [tread that way] again [*lo tosifun*]: this had been stated as a commandment, but unwritten. Some say that [the prohibition] is from [*for the Egyptians whom you see today,*] *you will not see them ever again* (Ex. 14:13), but this has a different manner [of interpretation] °(Ibn Ezra).[10]

17. **so that his heart not deviate** [*ve-lo yasur levavo*]: for he will pursue his desires.[11]

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7. B.B. 91b.

8. This sentence was drawn from Ramban's commentary on Deut. 21:16, where he explained that the words *lo tukhal* were to be taken as an outright warning against doing something, as if to say "do not give yourself the possibility of doing this."

9. This comment was partly drawn from Ramban.

10. I.e., the verse in Exodus did not constitute a commandment.

11. Ibn Ezra.

likewise, he should not accumulate silver and gold excessively [*ve-ḫesef ve-zahav lo yarbeh lo meʾod*]: The exaggerated accumulation of silver and gold not only fails to enhance or strengthen the well-being of the people, but it harms it, for the more silver and gold he accumulates the more he will increase the desire for pleasures, large buildings, orchards, fields, and pastures.[12] The abundance of pleasures will result in the diminishing of powers and the slothfulness of hands,[13] and this is not the place to demonstrate the great harm that will be done to ethical behavior, which is the pillar of general well-being and the foundation of national contentment. Once you shake the pillar, the entire edifice will fall.[14]

18. **when he sits on the throne** [*ve-hayah ḫe-shivto*]: at the beginning of his reign.[15]

copy of this teaching [*mishneh ha-torah*]: a second copy °(Ibn Ezra), and it is rendered thus in the German translation. The Sages said °(Sanhedrin 21b) [that he was to write] two Torah scrolls, one that was placed in his repository, and one that came and went with him; as such, the word *mishneh* means "double," as in *double amounts of food* [*leḥem mishneh*] (Ex. 16:22). Onqelos translated the word as *patshegen* from the sense of "repeating" and "uttering."[16]

from that which is kept with the priests from the tribe of Levi [*mi-lifne ha-ḫohanim ha-leviyyim*]: the king should write himself a copy from that book that is before or in the hands of the Priests and Levites; this is how the German translator rendered it, for that is the effect of the letter *mem* in *mi-lifne*, as if saying "from the book that is before. . . ."

19. **with him** [*ve-hayetah ʿimmo*]: the Torah; and **read from it** [*ve-qara vo*]: referring to the book.[17]

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12. The last two words could be read *sidim ve-sadot*, referring to different kinds of agricultural lands, or *shidim ve-shiddot* (see Ecc. 2:8), meaning either "coffers" or, as Mendelssohn explained in *Megillat Qohelet*, "seized women," i.e., taken by force.

13. Alluding to Ecc. 10:18, where he commented: "When someone becomes lazy and does not repair a small opening in the roof, the result is the collapse of the entire roof; and if the householder lowers his hands and sits on them, the rain will eventually drip into the house. This is said by way of parable with regard to kings and ministers. If they engage in eating and pleasures and become indolent in overseeing state matters, the kingship will become corrupt, the way a house is very slowly destroyed from the laziness of its owner."

14. On Mendelssohn's attitudes toward the potentially deleterious effects of luxury, see his discussion in the epilogue to Ex. 40 above, pp. 467–70.

15. Ibn Ezra.

16. The last two sentences were drawn from Rashi; Mendelssohn added the explanation of *mishneh* as double and the reference to Ex. 16:22.

17. Ibn Ezra and Ramban.

all his life [*ḳol yeme ḥayyav*]: when he turns from his affairs, as in *you shall recite it day and night* (Josh. 1:8).

20. **that his heart would not raise itself** [*le-vilti rum levavo*]: this refers to all the proscriptions stated above, for the accumulation of horses and wives, silver and gold will produce an arrogance and haughtiness as we explained above. Ramban stated: "The Torah alludes here to the prohibition against conceit, for the verse[s] restrain the king from conceit and haughtiness with regard to his brothers,[18] all the more so others who are not worthy of such. Scripture warns even one who is entitled to self-importance and superiority to be as humble-of-heart as his brothers who are inferior to him, for conceit is a repugnant trait and contemptible to God even with regard to a king, as it is written *every haughty person is an abomination to the Lord* (Prov. 16:15)."[19]

and that he not deviate [*u-le-vilti sur*]: this refers back to *read from it . . . he would learn* (v. 19).[20]

18. The phrase "with regard to his brothers" was inserted by Mendelssohn.
19. The citation from Ramban was somewhat abbreviated.
20. This was suggested by Ibn Ezra.

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GLOSSARY

Abraham b. Meir ibn Ezra (1092–1167) Spanish grammarian, poet, and exegete. Like other Hispano-Jewish scholars of the eleventh and twelfth centuries, Ibn Ezra was steeped in both the Hebrew linguistic and exegetical traditions and the Greco-Arabic philosophical traditions that had taken root in the Iberian Peninsula. He produced a number of important Hebrew-language grammars and treatises, and penned two commentaries to the Hebrew Bible. His grammars and commentaries were reprinted in early modern Europe and proved to be popular among the early adepts of the Jewish Enlightenment.

Albo, Joseph (c. 1380–c. 1444) Spanish communal leader and author of *Sefer ha-ʿIqqarim*, a broad and systematic presentation of medieval Jewish philosophy. The comprehensive nature of the book and its accessible language made it one of the most popular philosophical texts of the early modern period.

ʿ***Arukh*** a lexicon of the Talmud and midrashim by the Italian scholar R. Nathan b. Yehiel (1035–c. 1110).

Azariah de' Rossi (c. 1511–c. 1577) Northern Italian scholar whose magnum opus, *Meʾor ʿEnayim* (Mantua, 1574), combined traditional rabbinic and medieval texts, the writings of Philo and Josephus, and an array of non-Jewish sources from late antiquity to the Renaissance into a wide-ranging book on Jewish history and literature. The book was at once apologetic and critical-minded and elicited considerable attention and controversy among early modern Jewish scholars. Mendelssohn's many references to this book focused on its largest part, *Imre Binah*.

Bahya ibn Paquda (eleventh century) Spanish rabbinic court judge and author of *The Book of Guidance to the Duties of the Heart*. Translated in the twelfth century from the Judeo-Arabic to Hebrew by Judah ibn Tibbon as *Ḥovot ha-Levavot*, the book became a highly popular and often printed work of Jewish ethics. It is a work of philosophical mysticism and asceticism, combining elements of Neo-Platonism and Sufi pietism.

cantillation see *teʿamim*.

Eichhorn, Johann (1753–1827) Protestant professor of Oriental Languages in Jena and Göttingen. His *Einleitung in das Alte Testament* (3 vols., Leipzig, 1780–1783) was a seminal work that developed and gave impetus to the critical study of Scripture in German lands.

ʿEn Yaʿaqov an anthology of Talmudic aggadah begun by Jacob b. Solomon Ibn Habib (c. 1445–1515/16) in Salonika, but completed after his death by his son Levi. The work also contained a commentary on selected aggadot that cited the work of the most important medieval scholars. This collection was reprinted in Europe over two dozen times before the end of the eighteenth century and attained something of a canonical status.

Guide see Maimonides.

Ḥovot ha-Levavot see Bahya ibn Paquda.

Ibn Ezra see Abraham Ibn Ezra.

Ibn Melekh; Solomon ben Melekh (1480–?) a little known sixteenth-century scholar who resided in Constantinople. His one surviving book was *Mikhlal Yofi*, a grammatical and philological commentary on Scripture that drew heavily on earlier medieval scholarship (mainly Ibn Ezra and Radaq) and presented their work in a clear and concise fashion.

Ibn Tibbon a medieval family of translators from Arabic and Judeo-Arabic to Hebrew, who had a major role in making the philosophical treasures of Spanish Jewry accessible to the scholars of Ashkenaz. Judah ibn Tibbon (d. 1190) translated a number of enduring classics, including Judah ha-Levi's *Kuzari*; his son Samuel (c. 1150–c. 1230) translated Maimonides' *Guide*; and Samuel's son Moses translated Maimonides' treatise on logic.

ʿIqqarim see Albo, Joseph.

Israel b. Moses ha-Levi of Zamosc (c. 1700–1772) born and educated in southeastern Polish lands, he developed an interest in science, which he sought to harmonize with classical Jewish texts. Zamosc moved to Berlin in the early 1740s and became one of Mendelssohn's early teachers and mentors. Among other writings, he penned a commentary on the *Kuzari*, a copy of which Mendelssohn had in his possession. This commentary was later printed in a widely disseminated edition of the *Kuzari*.

Jonathan ben Uzziel (first century BCE) an early Tannaitic scholar and the reputed author of Aramaic translations of the Pentateuch and Prophets; these translations were printed in some rabbinic Bibles of the early modern era alongside Onqelos.

Judah ha-Levi (c. 1075–1141) one of the greatest Hispano-Jewish poets and philosophers of the medieval period. His *Kuzari*, written in Judeo-Arabic but translated soon afterward into Hebrew by Judah ibn Tibbon, is a medieval philosophical classic that was reprinted often and carefully studied in the early modern period. One of Mendelssohn's early teachers, Israel Zamosc, wrote a widely used commentary on this work.

Kimhi, R. David (Radaq; 1160–1235) a Provençal philologist and biblical exegete whose *Sefer ha-Shorashim* helped to disseminate the grammatical work of the earliest Hispano-Jewish grammarians. This book was both biblical dictionary and lexicon and served as one of the most important reference works of the pre-modern era.

Kuzari see Judah ha-Levi.

Levi b. Gershom (Ralbag or Gersonides; 1288–1344) a Provençal philosopher and scientist who penned *Sefer Milḥamot ha-Shem*, an important philosophical treatise, and commentaries to almost all the books of Scripture.

Levita, Elijah Bahur (1469–1549) a German scholar who lived much of his life in Italy. Levita had a wide range of interests, and he contributed to the early modern study of the Hebrew Bible in three areas: the *masorah*, Hebrew grammar, and the Aramaic translations of Scripture. He also authored an early Judeo-German translation of the Pentateuch.

Maimonides (R. Moses b. Maimon, or Rambam, c. 1135–1204) one of the most important and influential medieval rabbinic authorities, whose legal, ethical, and popular writings occupied a central place in traditional Jewish learning. His classical writings included an Arabic-language commentary on the Mishnah, an all-encompassing code of Jewish law titled *Mishneh Torah*, and a philosophical treatise (in Arabic), *The Guide of the Perplexed*.

***masorah*/masoretes/masoretic text** in its narrow sense, *masorah* refers to a compilation of highly technical annotations that sought to establish and preserve an authoritative text of the Hebrew Bible, including not only its consonants but also the vocalization and cantillation. The development of this apparatus is attributed to early medieval masoretes, culminating with two rival tenth-century Tiberian scholars, Aaron ben Asher and (Moses?) ben Naftali. Broadly speaking, the masoretic text refers to the traditional Hebrew version of Scripture.

Mekhilta a Tannaitic collection generally dated to the second century, incorporating midrashic passages on the narrative and legal sections of Exodus.

***melişah* (pl. *melişot*)** in its medieval and early modern usage, it was a term connoting refined and tasteful speech or writing; the term could also be used to refer to a stylized mode of writing.

Me'or ʿEnayim see Azariah de' Rossi.

midrash broadly speaking, midrash was synonymous with the rabbinic interpretation of Scripture, covering both legal (halakhic) sections of the Pentateuch and the narrative and nonlegal (aggadic) portions of Scripture.

Mishnah the authoritative collection of rabbinic law, redacted by Rabbi Judah the Prince in the second century, that served as the basis for both the Babylonian and Palestinian Talmuds.

Mizrahi, Elijah (c. 1450–1526) lived in Constantinople and was the leading Ottoman rabbinic authority of his day. His supercommentary on Rashi (on the Pentateuch),

published shortly after his death, provided a particularly clear and lucid exposition of Rashi's exegesis. It has proven to be one of the most enduring works of its kind.

Moses b. Nahman (Nahmanides, or Ramban 1194–1270) an outstanding Catalan scholar who penned Talmudic novellae, numerous essays on religious themes, and a commentary on the Pentateuch. His exegetical approach reflected his variegated intellectual interests; it exhibited an abiding commitment to *peshaṭ*, a deep appreciation for midrash, and the nascent development of pre-Zoharic Jewish mysticism.

novellae novel analytical interpretations of rabbinic literature.

Onqelos (early second century) a proselyte and traditionally identified as the author of the rabbinically sanctioned Aramaic translation (Targum) of the Pentateuch. This translation served as an exegetical touchstone for Jewish scholars of the medieval and modern eras.

Radaq see Kimhi, David.

Ralbag see Levi b. Gershom.

Ramban see Moses b. Nahman.

Rashba see Solomon b. Abraham Adret.

Rashbam see Samuel b. Meir.

Rashi see Solomon b. Isaac.

Ritva see Yom Tov b. Abraham Ishbili.

ṣaḥut a term that connotes linguistic clarity and purity, also a certain fluency, often juxtaposed with speech that falters or obscures.

Samuel b. Meir (Rashbam; c. 1085–1174) a grandson of Rashi and one of the leading Talmudic scholars of his generation who made an early and lasting contribution to the Tosafot. Rashbam's Bible commentary remained in manuscript and virtually unknown until the early eighteenth century; Mendelssohn was one of the first scholars to use this work extensively.

Sefer Yeṣirah a cosmological-mystical work, probably composed between the third and sixth centuries, that posits the letters of the Hebrew alphabet as the foundation of all creation.

Sforno, Obadiah (c. 1475–1550) a northern Italian scholar, best known for his commentaries on the Pentateuch and other biblical books.

Solomon b. Abraham Adret (Rashba; c. 1235–c. 1310) the leading Catalonian scholar of his generation, generally known for his cautious view regarding the spread of philosophical ideas. His novellae and writings were accorded great respect and authority.

Solomon b. Isaac (Rashi; 1040–1105) the outstanding Ashkenazic commentator to Scripture and the Babylonian Talmud. Although he championed a plain-sense or straightforward (*peshaṭ*) reading of Scripture, his commentary on the Pentateuch was permeated with rabbinic material, and his exegesis thus wedded a textual sensibility

with midrashic readings. Rashi's commentary became a medieval classic and was granted a certain canonical status.

Talmud the classical rabbinic text that served as the primary focus of rabbinic learning and the source for all ritual and legal practices down to the modern era. The Babylonian Talmud was redacted in the fifth century and came to be the dominant and authoritative rabbinic text. The Jerusalem (or: Palestinian) Talmud, which occupied a more marginal place in the rabbinic scholarship of the medieval and early modern period, was redacted in the fourth century. Mendelssohn's teacher, R. David Fraenkel, distinguished himself by penning a commentary on the Jerusalem Talmud.

Targum see Onqelos.

ṭeʿamim* (sing. *ṭaʿam*) or *ṭaʿame ha-miqra term for a series of diacritical marks preserved as an integral part of the masoretic text. They appear above and below almost all words in the Hebrew Bible, and have three functions: (1) they provide a form of punctuation, parsing the verse into clauses and sub-clauses; (2) they serve as a form of notation for the public liturgical chanting of the Torah; (3) they serve as a guide to proper pronunciation by indicating syllabic stress. Mendelssohn was primarily interested in the *ṭeʿamim* for their syntactical value; he adopted a tradition of parsing the dozen or so common diacritical marks according to their relative conjunctive and disjunctive qualities, and utilized them as an incisive exegetical tool.

Tosafot/Tosafists a collection of dense glosses on the Talmud, often using Rashi's commentary as a springboard, penned by Franco-German scholars from the mid-twelfth to the mid-thirteenth centuries.

Walton, Brian British divine and scholar who edited the magisterial *Biblia Sacra Polyglotta* (6 vols., 1654–57), more popularly known as the London Polyglot. This Bible included the Samaritan version of the Pentateuch and numerous introductions and prolegomena that disseminated early modern views on the reliability of the received Hebrew text.

Wolff, Christian (1679–1754) the leading philosopher of the Enlightenment in German-speaking lands in the second and third quarters of the eighteenth century, merging key elements of the philosophies of Descartes and Leibniz. As the most important German philosopher between Leibniz and Kant, Wolff coined much of the German philosophical lexicon.

Yom Tov ben Abraham Ishbili (Ritva; c. 1250–1330) one of the leading Spanish Talmudists of his generation, best known for his novellae on the Talmud.

Zamosc see Israel b. Moses ha-Levi of Zamosc.

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GENERAL INDEX

Aaron (Aharon): and the golden calf, 405–10, 420–22; punished with Moses for failing to sanctify God, 483–84; seeing the face of Moses, 459–60
Abarbanel, Isaac, 40, 231, 345n4, 347n15, 358–59, 414n42
Abel, 249, 251–53, 313
Aboab, Isaac, 289
Abulafia, Meir b. Todros ha-Levi, 294
accident/accidental properties, 54, 77, 93–95, 213, 483; and impermanence, 165–66, 193, 303; by virtue of an accident, 92, 94
Adam and Eve: before eating of the tree of knowledge, 314–16, 324; born into a world of good, 182–83, 206, 315–16; expulsion from the garden of Eden, 321–22; as helpmates, 319–20; sexual desire experienced by, 312, 315–16
adultery, 199, 375, 379, 420
"Akademie für die Wissenschaft des Judentums," 13–14
Alashqar, Moses, 260–61, 263
Albo, Joseph, 134n41, 166n28, 258–59, 340n34, 467n15
Alexandria Library, 282–86
Alfasi, Isaac, 280
ʿAlim li-Terufah, 7, 221, 223, 234n54, 235, 297, 302
Allgemeine Deutsche Bibliothek (journal), 120–21, 236
all-merciful (*raḥum*), 445
Altmann, Alexander, 5n7, 15–17, 23n1, 27, 221n4, 237–38
anger: God's anger, 415–17, 425–26, 436–38, 445, 448, 449, 452; as a human attribute, 133–37, 185, 483
apodictic propositions, 86, 90, 91
Aqilas (or Aquila), 277–78, 281
Arama, Isaac, 248, 351n40, 439n52
Aramaic, 222, 227, 248–49, 254–58, 263, 265, 268; Levita on Aramic translations, 273–74; Mendelssohn on Aramaic translations, 275–81, 285–86. *See also* Hebrew language; languages; Onqelos (Targum); *Targum Yerushalmi*
Archimedes, 82, 87
d'Argens, Marquis, 110
Aristeas the Greek, 282–84
Aristobulus the Jew, 284–85
Aristotle, 72, 75; and Arabic philosophy, 105; on internal and external speech, 97; on governance, 105; on nature of good and evil, 312; works of, 97n2. *See also* philosophies
arithmetic, 98, 99
Arkush, Allan, 17–18

art (*melaʾkhah*): Maimonides on the term, 98; Mendelssohn on the importance of craftwork, 467–69; as preparation of the soul, 98–99; skilled artistry (*Kunst, Kunstgeschicklichkeit*), 403–4; and the Tabernacle, 465–70
art of demonstration, 90, 91
art of logic (*Die Kunst der Dialektik*): constitutive parts, 96–98; as an instrument of science, 101; and Torah study, 70–74. See also *Beʾur Millot Ha-Higgayon*
ʿArukh (Nathan b. Yehiel), 69, 247, 280
Ashkenazic Jewry: limited study of logic, 53; preference for *derash* interpretations, 109
astronomy, 72, 98
Athias, Joseph, 288
Athias, Yom Tov, 288
authority: and *ḥoq*, 104; political sovereignty and, 115, 185–87; rebellion against, 446. *See also* governance; politics

Babylonian exile, 268, 275–77
Bahur, Elijah. *See* Levita, Elijah (Elijah Bahur)
Bahya ibn Paquda, 49, 70, 287
Baruch, 243–44
ben Asher, 245
Bendit, Jeremiah, 296–97
Benjamin, Georg, 6, 7
ben Naftali, 245
Berenstein, Samuel, 11
Berlin, Adele, 240
Berlin Royal Academy of Sciences, 3
Beʾur. See *Sefer Netivot ha-Shalom (The Book of the Paths of Peace)* [Mendelssohn]
beʾur ha-millot (Megillat Qohelet), 109, 112
beʾur ha-ṭeʿamim (Megillat Qohelet), 109, 112–13; focus on providence and immortality of the soul, 114, 163, 165, 167–69, 197, 199–200, 202–3; Mendelssohn's use of non-Jewish exegetes, 113–14. *See also* philosophical commentary
Beʾur Millot Ha-Higgayon: Altmann's passing mention of, 15, 16; description and publishing, 3, 9; editors' introduction, 53–60; etymology of *higgayon*, 66, 68–69; German translation, 19; ignored by Graetz and Mahler, 12–13; inclusion in Jubilee edition, 14; Leo Strauss's selected German translations, 63–64; Maimonides and the legitimation of the study of logic, 72; Mendelssohn's introduction, 66–75; Mendelssohn's theory of language, 56–57; secondary literature, 63–64; the text and its publication history, 60–63; widespread study of, 11. *See also* logic; Maimonides; *Millot Ha-Higgayon* (Maimonides)
Bezalel, 402, 404
Bible, Hebrew: cantillation and vocalization, 252–53, 263–70; original script, 253–63. *See also* cantillation marks; Hebrew script; *masorah*; *Megillat Qohelet*; Pentateuch; *Sefer Netivot ha-Shalom*
biblical criticism, 30n9, 223–24, 254n77, 259n97, 261–62, 264n122, 278n29, 283n47, 288, 290, 468n18
biblical poetry: accompanied by melodies and musical instruments, 346; appreciation of, 351–52; Azariah de' Rossi on, 347–50; in comparison to Greek and Latin poetry, 344–46, 348–49; designed for emotional and spiritual impact, 345–51; poetic syllogisms, 88, 90, 91; and Psalms, 346, 349, 351; the Sages on the division of, 350–51; Solomon's Proverbs, 349; Song of the Sea, 2, 240, 344–52; sung in the Temple by Levites, 351
Blitz, Yequtiel, 289–90
Borodianski, Haim, 14
Bourel, Dominique, 19
Brandis, Christian August, 6–7, 8
Breuer, Edward, 64, 238

Brockhaus, F. A., 5, 6
Buber, Martin, 239
burning bush (thorn-bush), 325–26, 330
Butterworth, Charles, 64

Caceres, Samuel de, 288
Cahen, Samuel, 118
Cain, 249, 251–53, 313
cantillation, 40, 166, 224, 226, 230, 245, 275, 277, 285, 290, 292–94, 299–300; cantillation used in Job, Proverbs, and Psalms, 298; debate over antiquity of, 263–67; as exegetical tool applied, 144, 160, 166, 185, 198, 218, 323, 330, 357, 391, 443, 476; as mode of punctuation, 252–53; Torah written by Moses without vowel points, spaces, or, 263–64, 267–68, 269
Chelm, Solomon, 298
children: preventing children from studying *higgayon,* 29–30, 57, 69; transgression of parents visited on the, 447–48, 476–77. *See also* youth
Christian biblical interpretation, 113, 140, 223–24, 290–91
circumcision, 482
Collected Works (*Gesammelte Schriften*, 1843–45), 7, 12, 234, 238
commandments: concerning kingship, 488–92; God's covenant with Israel, 130, 187, 355–56, 374, 378, 379, 450–62; interpretation of laws when counter to *peshaṭ,* 227–28, 382–83; meaning of (*taʿame ha-miṣvot*), 400–401, 465–70, 480–82. *See also* Ten Commandments
Constantine, Emperor, 279
Countenance (divine), 440–41
covenant: between God and Israel, 330–31, 334, 355–56, 383, 450, 458, 460, 485; prohibition of making with other peoples, 450–51, 458
covetousness, 93, 379, 457, 469. *See also* desire
craftwork: in the building of the Tabernacle, 465–70; skilled artistry, 403–4
creation: beauty and perfection of, 43–47; Mendelssohn on creation *ex nihilo*, 54; reflected in the Designated-Tent, 465–66

Daniel, 257, 258
Davidsohn, Chaim, 11
Davidsohn, Naftali, 11
Davidson, Herbert, 53n1
death, 160, 188, 210, 212, 215; as capital punishment, 375, 394, 423, 479; in connection with Adam and Eve and the tree of knowledge, 318–19, 322; as a good, 34–35, 304–5; *Megillat Qohelet* and the immortality of the soul, 129–30, 133, 138n59, 163, 197–98, 201–2, 210–14; of Moses, 241, 245; *Qohelet Musar* on, 31–35
Decalogue: discrepancies between Exodus and Deuteronomy, 124, 126, 379; introductory essay on revelation and belief, 2, 357–63; overview of the, 376–81
deeds: done for the sake of heaven, 470; facility of desire and performing good, 314–15; free will, 323–24; God's goodness and good, 31–35, 44, 161, 194, 195–96, 438, 439; judgment of all, 218; man's rejoicing in his, 166, 167; natural science to understand God's, 98, 99–100
Della Valle, Pietro, 261n112
Demetrius of Phalerium, 282, 284, 285
demonstrations: composed of different syllogisms, 79, 88, 90, 91; use of logic, 71, 79
derash/derush interpretation: Ashkenazi Jewry's preference for, 109; Mendelssohn's effort to reconcile *peshaṭ* with, 13, 109, 111–16, 119, 123–29, 293–94; as secondary meaning of Scripture, 111,

derash/derush interpretation (*continued*) 126–27; veracity of, 128–30. *See also* meaning; Scripture; Torah
Descartes, René, 55
Designated-Tent (*ohel mo'ed*): explanation of name, 432; meaning of, 465–70; Moses' entrance into, 461–62. *See also* Tabernacle
desire, 38, 44, 46, 81, 93, 103–4, 154, 159, 180, 205, 209–10, 350, 491; proscription against coveting others' possession, 376, 457; and the transgression of Adam and Eve, 311–16, 322, 324
Deuteronomy: contents of, 241; *Sefer Netivot ha-Shalom* selections from, 485–92
Deutsche Encyclopädie, 121
dialectica, 69–70, 97–98
dialectical syllogisms, 89, 91
Dienstag, Jacob, 64
dietary laws, 399–401
Diogenes Laërtius, 99n4
divine science, 55, 98–100
Divine Wisdom: acting with purpose and design toward many ends, 126–28
Döderlein, Johann Christian, 235–36
doorpost, 387–89, 482
Dubno, Solomon, 23n1, 223, 224, 228–29, 230n35, 235, 292–98, 299n3, 325n2, 474n1
Dubnow, Simon, 12, 228, 229
Duran, Profiat, 260–61

Ecclesiastes: contradictions in, 131–41; deliberation over inclusion in the Talmud, 112, 131; Mendelssohn's alternative to traditional chapter divisions, 115, 139–40, 167, 194. *See also* Hebrew Bible; *Megillat Qohelet*
Edels, Samuel, 278–79
Efros, Israel, 63, 64
Eger, Akiba, 10
Egypt: Alexandria Library, 282–86; Israelites as idolators in, 331n42, 412; preservation of Israelite distinctiveness in, 29, 250, 274n14, 275
Eichhorn, Johann Gottlieb, 259n97, 261n109, 262n115, 263n118, 264n122, 278n29, 279n31, 283n47, 286n57, 287nn62–63, 288
Eliezer ha-Modai, 69, 255, 277
elohim. See God, names of
Emden, Jacob, 266
Emmerich (Gumpertz), Aaron, 96
enemy: proscription against bearing false witness against your, 375, 390; returning the ox of your, 392
Enlightenment. *See* European Enlightenment; *Haskalah* (Jewish Enlightenment)
enthymeme, 90, 91
Epistle Concerning Animals, 49
essence: by virtue of an essence, 92–94
Eternal/the Eternal Being. *See* God, names of
Euchel, Isaac, 5
Euclid, 82, 83n10, 87
European Enlightenment: hostility to traditional modes of Jewish biblical interpretation, 110, 224, 226; Mendelssohn's desire to harmonize Judaism and, 111–12; Mendelssohn's work in context of, 2, 4; natural religion and the, 114. See also *Haskalah* (Jewish Enlightenment)
Eve. *See* Adam and Eve
evil: accepting the bad alongside the good, 31–35, 36–39; evildoers who appear to go unpunished, 190, 196–97; governance and, 102, 176, 188–89; judgment not immediately imposed for evildoing, 190–92; Maimonides on the nature of good and, 312; misunderstanding death as, 34–35; tree of knowledge of good and evil, 311–16, 321–24; true and imagined evil, 104, 160, 314; warning against judicial malfeasance, 390–92,

393–94. *See also* good/goodness; sinners; wicked
Exodus: contents of the, 241; selections from *Sefer Netivot ha-Shalom*, 325–470
experience (by means of the senses), 57, 80, 86–88
external speech, 55–57, 73, 77, 97–98, 252; relationship between internal and, 66–68

Al-Farabi, 55
fear of God, 161–62, 191–92, 218
feasts and festivals. *See* holidays
felicity. *See* happiness/true felicity
first-born, 453–55
first-fruits, 398
first intelligibles: description of, 82; propositions of, 79, 82–83, 85, 86, 90, 91
foolishness: description of, 151–52; madness and, 151, 179–80, 181
forgiveness: as an attribute of God, 446; Moses asking on behalf of the nation, 413–15, 424–27, 449
Fox, Michael V., 120, 121
Fraenkel, David, 116, 278n25
free will, 323–24
Freudenthal, Gideon, 19, 239
Friedenthal, Aaron Zechariah (Aaron Jaroslav), 62, 65, 229
Friedländer, David, 5n6, 11, 117–18, 234n49

Garden of Eden: expulsion from, 321–22; the tree of knowledge of good and evil; tree of life, 310–11, 324
generalized induction, 90–91
generally accepted opinions: description of, 83–84; propositions of, 79–80, 83–84, 85, 88, 90, 91
Genesis: contents of the, 241; selections from *Sefer Netivot ha-Shalom*, 303–24
geometric theorems, 82, 86, 87
geometry, 98, 99
German (language): in Hebrew script, 117, 224, 232n44, 233n45, 235; as *leshon ashkenaz*, 223n9, 275, 289n76, 292n90; translation of Hebrew texts into, 3, 6, 8, 120, 222–25, 228, 235–36, 289
Germanifying myth: Altmann's biography, 15–17; Arkush's description of Mendelssohn as radical deist, 17–18; the collected works of Mendelssohn (1843–45), 5–7; Euchel and Jenisch's early handling of the Hebrew writings, 4–5; Kayserling's assessment of Mendelssohn's Hebrew writings, 8–9, 12, 12–13, 17; perceptions of the Pentateuch translation, 6, 12, 13; recent scholarship, 18–19
Gersonides. *See* Levi b. Gershom
Gesammelte Schriften (1843–45) [*Collected Works*], 7, 12, 234, 238
Gesammelte Schrifiten Jubiläumsausgabe, 238
Gillman, Abigail, 239
Giqatillah, Joseph, 225, 231, 332, 334n57
God: accepting good and bad from, 36–39; glory of, 328, 354, 360, 362, 369, 437–40, 443, 450, 459, 461–62, 463–66; of Israel, 354–56, 362n28, 407, 457; as a jealous God, 366–67, 369, 451–52; profaning the name of, 337, 368–71, 414, 490; prophecy in the name of, 486–87; sanctifying the name of, 422, 483–84. *See also* Divine Wisdom
God, names of: *el*, *el shaddai* (all-powerful God), 337–39, 414, 444–45, 448; *elohim*, 281n40, 307–9, 312, 327, 334, 364, 388; *yhvh* (the Eternal, the Eternal Being), 225, 308–9, 332–34, 337, 338–41, 342–43, 362–63, 409–10, 438, 443–45, 447
gods, other, 332, 357–58, 360–61, 364–66, 368, 395–96, 406–11, 420, 425, 451–53, 458, 486

golden calf: Aaron's role in, 407–9, 421–22; destruction of, 419; God's anger over the sin of the, 410–12; Moses chastises Israelites for the sin of the, 422–27; Moses pleads with God to not destroy his people over the, 412–16; punishment for the, 427–28
Gombiner, Abraham, 67
good/goodness: of all creation, 31–35, 36–39, 44, 70, 95, 169, 182, 184, 205, 303–5, 311–16, 318–20, 322, 339, 438–39, 486; distinguishing good from evil, 73, 98, 101–2, 104, 137, 185, 218, 323–24, 470; distinguishing true from imagined good, 149, 153–54, 157, 161, 180, 192, 197; in human fellowship, 319–20, 479; identified with the agreeable and appealing, 89; of the land of Israel, 329, 374
Gottlieb, Michah, 19, 237
Gottlober, Avraham Ber, 63
governance: of the city, 59, 102–4; of the household, 102–4; of the large nation, 102–4; monarchical, 86, 173–74, 185–87, 490–91. *See also* kings/kingship; politics
Graetz, Heinrich, 12
grammar, 13, 55, 71, 97–98, 109, 140, 223, 228, 292, 294, 297–98, 301. *See also* cantillation marks; external speech; languages
Günzberg, Mordechai Aaron, 9, 119
Guttmacher, Elijah, 10–11

Ha-Cohen, Raphael, 11
Hai Gaon, 260, 396
Halakhot Gedolot, 358–59
Haller, Albrecht von, 80n3
Hanau, Solomon, 109n1, 144n8, 298
happiness/true felicity, 43–47, 129, 135, 138–39, 149–51, 153–54, 157, 170, 175, 179, 191–92, 314–16, 322, 324, 352, 447, 470
hardships: accepting both the good and bad of, 36–39
Harlay, Achille de, 261n112
Harvey, Warren Zev, 19, 239
Haskalah (Jewish Enlightenment): efforts to rejuvenate Jewish philosophy, 53–54; *Ha-Me'assef*, 26; Mendelssohn's work in context of, 2, 4, 64; *Qohelet Musar's* influence, 25, 26; Rabbinic or communal opposition to the, 12, 24. *See also* European Enlightenment
Hayyim of Volozhin, 11
Hebrew language: cantillation and vocalization integral to biblical language, 252–53, 263–70; external speech, 29–30, 57, 66–68; forgotten during Babylonian exile, 268, 275–77; key to preserving identity during Egyptian enslavement, 252–53; as language of creation, 28–29, 247; language of divine communication, 28, 246–53; melodic intonation of the, 252–53; *Or li-Netivah* on grammatical aspects of, 228; our obligation to master, 29; *Qohelet Musar* on the Jewish neglect of the, 28–31; *Qohelet Musar* on translating foreign languages into Hebrew, 48–50; *Sefer Netivot ha-Shalom* on parts of speech, 299–302; similarities with Aramaic, 248; study among Sephardim, 109; use of the term *leshon 'ivri,* 250. *See also* Aramaic; languages; speech
Hebrew Review, 236
Hebrew script: *ketav ashurit*, 254, 255–56, 257, 259–60, 262, 263, 265, 268; *ketav ha-nishtevan*, 255–56; *ketav 'ivri*, 254, 256–57, 259, 260–63
Heinemann, Moses, 118
Hennings, August, 11
Herxheimer, J., 234
Ḥevrat Ḥinukh Ne'arim, 62, 117
hieroglyphics, 474n1, 481
higgayon. *See* logic
Hildesheimer, Esriel, 10

Hilfrich, Carola, 19
holidays: Aaron declares a festival to worship the golden calf, 409–10; feast of the first-fruits, 398, 456; feast of the gathering, 389–99, 456; feast of the unleavened cakes, 397, 452–53
Homberg, Naphtali Herz, 229, 234n51, 297n119
Hume, David, 170n1, 371n80, 469n19

Ibn Ezra, Abraham b. Meir: on the contradictions in Ecclesiastes, 131–32, 135, 137; on differences between the Decalogue in Exodus and Deuteronomy, 380–81; on the Mosaic authorship of the Torah, 244n22; and the primary intended meaning of Scripture, 124, 126; as source for Mendelssohn's exegesis (selected examples), 113, 140, 145n14, 200n19, 216n4, 225, 227, 231, 238, 293, 305, 323, 338n12, 392–93, 405, 447–48n32, 472, 490; on use of logic, 74
Ibn Habib, Jacob, 242n12, 259–60, 417
Ibn Hayyim, Aaron, 74
Ibn Hayyuj, Judah, 164n20, 200n19, 266
Ibn Melekh, Solomon, 112, 123n4, 140, 231
Ibn Tibbon family, 48–49, 60, 64, 123n4, 152n20
idolatry: golden calf, 405–28; among Israelites in Egypt, 331; proscription against, 361, 364–66, 375, 378–79, 383–84, 396–97, 452–53, 474–75, 486–87; and Samaritans, 261; writing and pictorial script, 56, 474–75. *See also* worship
immortality of the soul, 1, 3, 114, 129–30, 138, 163, 165–69, 197, 199–200, 202–3, 213–14
Imre Binah. *See* Rossi, Azariah de'
Inca *ḳhipu* (or *quipu*), 481n4
inductive syllogisms, 90–91
injustice, 114, 133, 135–36, 163, 197, 202. *See also* justice
intellect: art of logic as guiding the, 97–98, 101
intelligibles: propositions of first, 79, 82–83, 85, 86, 90, 91; secondary, 86, 87–91
internal speech: art of logic guiding, 97–98; *hagah/higgayon* connoting both external and, 29–30, 57, 66, 68; relationship between external and, 66–68
Ishmael, 286
Israelites: covenant with God, 245, 330–31, 334, 383, 450–51, 458, 460, 485; Moses' pleas on behalf of, 412–16, 425, 435–36, 449; neglecting Hebrew in Babylonian exile, 268, 275–77; punishment for turning their back on God, 476–77; sin of the golden calf, 405–28
Isserles, Moses, 67, 362n28

Jablonski, Daniel Ernst, 295
Jacob b. Hayyim, 269
Jacob b. Meir (Rabbenu Tam), 254
Jaroslav, Aaron (Aaron Zechariah Friedenthal), 62, 65, 229
jealous God, 366–67, 369, 451, 452
Jenisch, Daniel, 5
Jeremiah, 244
Jeroboam, 174
Jewish Encyclopedia, 12–13
Jewish Enlightenment. See *Haskalah*
Jewish exegetical tradition, 1, 3–4, 25, 53, 74; in *Megillat Qohelet*, 109–15, 120, 123–28, 130–31, 139–40; in *Sefer Netivot ha-Shalom*, 223, 227–28, 230–32, 292–94, 383–83. See also *derash/derush* interpretation; midrashic interpretation; *peshaṭ* (plain-sense) interpretation
Jewish Publication Society Bible Commentary, 120, 122, 239
Jolowicz, Heymann, 7, 236
Jonathan b. Uzziel. *See* Targum Jonathan
Josephus, 283

Joshua: authorship of verses at the end of Deuteronomy, 242; Torah transmitted from Moses to, 84, 245, 253, 264, 269
Jospe, Raphael, 238
joy: in loving God, 46–47; in youth, 204–6. *See also* merriment
Jubilee year, 388, 389
Judah ha-Levi, 123nn3–4, 216n4, 231, 238, 287, 290n81, 340n34; on the antiquity and qualities of biblical Hebrew, 28–29, 75, 247n39, 249nn47–48, 250nn54–55, 264; on biblical poetry, 344n1, 348; on the golden calf, 405–6, 409n18; on good and evil, 314n17; on the importance of admonishments, 216–17; on living a balanced life, 205–6; on the oral transmission of the Torah, 267; on the particularism of revelation, 363; on scientific knowledge of the ancient Israelites, 213n43; on the study of logic, 73n21
Judah Loew b. Beṣalel (Maharal), 109n1, 397n32
Judaism: Altmann on Enlightenment and, 16–17; Lavater's challenge to Mendelssohn's adherence to, 12; Mendelssohn's demonstration of harmony of European Enlightenment and, 112
judges, referred to as *elohim*, 388
judgment by God, 163–64, 168, 187, 190–92, 202–3, 218, 393–94
judgment by judges: proscription against bearing false witness, 375, 390; proscription against distorting justice, 393–94; proscription against following the multitude toward evil, 390–91
justice: and governance, 104–5; zealousness in protecting, 135–36. *See also* injustice

Kabbalistic literature, 3, 266
Kafah, Joseph, 63
Kalam, 81
Kalir, Samson, 74
Kalischer, Zvi Hirsch, 10
Kamenetzky, Yaacov, 120n58
Kant, Immanuel, 3
Kayserling, Meyer, 5, 8, 12–13, 17
Kennicott, Benjamin, 235, 262n115, 290n82
Kimhi, David (Radaq) [selected examples], 150n11, 211n34, 227, 293, 321n7, 326, 385, 396, 408, 413, 425, 461, 474
Kimhi, Joseph, 165
kindness: God's unending kindness and faithfulness, 445–46
kings/kingship, 115, 174–76, 185–87; limitations upon, 488, 490; precept to read and observe the Torah, 488, 490. *See also* governance; Solomon
Klaczko, Zwi Hirsch, 11
knowledge: contradictions in Ecclesiastes with regard to, 137–38; definition and meaning of, 403; difference between madness, foolishness, and, 151–52; and governance, 59, 102–4; historical, 58–59, 83–84; and natural science, 99–100; Solomon's desire for, 151–52; the tree of knowledge of good and evil, 311–16; using logic to gain, 70–72. *See also* foolishness; good/goodness
Köhler, Johann Bernhard, 236
Kraemer, Joel, 63, 64
Krochmal, Nahman, 9, 119
Krochmalnik, Daniel, 121, 238–39
Kugel, James L., 240
ḳutim. *See* Samaria
Kuzari. *See* Judah ha-Levi

La Mettrie, 114
languages: debate over origins and nature of, 56; external speech, 29–30, 57, 66–68; Maimonides' discussion of logic and, 55, 58; Mendelssohn's theory of, 56–57; mnemonic signs as, 482; on translating from Hebrew to German, 228; translation, 271–74. *See also*

Aramaic; grammar; Hebrew language; speech; translations
Lavater, Johann Caspar, 12, 13
Lederman, Jean, 239
Lefin, Mendel, 119
Lehman, James H., 64
Leibniz, Gottfried Wilhelm, 54n4, 166n28, 239
Leibnizian-Wolffian philosophy, 54, 114
Leo, Hartog, 117n43, 140n67
Lessing, Gotthold Ephraim, 3–4, 8
Levenson, Edward, 230n35, 237
Levi b. Gershom (Ralbag), 114–15, 139n60, 143n7, 166n29, 188n18, 190n2, 207n4, 212n36, 373n86, 466
Levison, George (Mordechai Gumpel ha-Levi), 116
Levita, Elijah (Elijah Bahur): on Aramaic translations of Scripture, 273–74; on the cantillation and vocalization of the Torah, 226, 265–68; German translation of the Pentateuch, 289; *Masoret ha-Masoret*, 264–65
Levites: biblical poetry sung in the Temple, 351; and the golden calf, 423–24
Leviticus (Priestly Law): contents of, 241
levity: anger versus, 134–37; as behavior of those without knowledge, 154
Lewin, Hirschel, 232
Loewe, Joel Brill, 117–18
logic (*higgayon*): art of, 97–98, 101; construction of syllogisms and reliable demonstrations, 71, 79; to distinguish truth vs. falsehood, 72–75, 77–78; Al-Farabi's conception of, 55; Maimonides on relationship of language and, 55, 58; as means of attaining perfection, 55; Mendelssohn's understanding of the nature and role of, 54–58; *Millot Ha-Higgayon* (Maimonides), 2, 53–54, 60, 64–65, 74–75, 79–95; terms for, 69–70. See also *Be'ur Millot Ha-Higgayon*; reason; science; truth
Lonzano, Menahem, 294
love: and friendship, 46, 479; love of God, 46–47, 367–68; love of society, 172; love of woman, 199; qualities of, 473; of your fellow man, 471–73
Lowth, Robert, 113n15, 344n1, 345n6
Luria, Isaac, 67n6
luxury, 2, 170n1, 314n19, 469n19, 491n14

Madhi, Muhsin, 64
madness: definition of, 151; stupidity, foolishness, and, 179–80, 181
Mahler, Raphael, 13
Maimon, Solomon, 61–62, 239
Maimonides: and Aristotelianism, 19; *Commentary on the Mishnah,* 49; errors regarding the senses, 81, 87; on governance, 59, 101, 103; *Guide of the Perplexed*, 49, 54, 81, 87, 95, 212, 231, 274, 328, 332, 363; on *ketav ashuri*, 263; on *ketav 'ivri*, 254–56; on the knowledge of Hebrew among Israelites, 276–77; Mendelssohn on intellectual kinship and identity with, 59–60; *Mishneh Torah*, 40, 169n5, 276–77, 331–32n42, 334n57, 365n45, 366n48, 380n134, 434n27, 441n60, 487n5; on the nature of good and evil, 312; Platonic conception of God, 54; on the proscription against making idols, 365–66; on the reasons for commandments, 400n45; *Sefer ha-Miṣvot*, 358n6, 365n45; on the Tabernacle, 466; on the tree of knowledge of good and evil, 312–13. See also *Be'ur Millot Ha-Higgayon*; *Millot Ha-Higgayon*
Mandelstamm, Leon, 11, 234
Mandeville, Bernard, 469n19
mankind: ability to attain perfection and felicity, 1, 44, 182, 333, 360n18, 361–62; language at creation, 247; need for fraternity, mutual assistance, and companionship, 172–73, 319–20, 479. *See also* men/man; wisdom; women/woman

masorah, 30, 151, 172, 224, 245, 264–65, 269–70, 277, 290–91, 293–95
mathematics, 82, 86, 87, 98, 99
mazzal, 210n25, 339n25, 376
meaning: challenges of translation, 271–74; Maimonides on interpreting parables, 212–13; PaRDeS as rubric for, 110. See also *derash/derush* interpretation; *peshaṭ* (plain-sense) interpretation
Megillat Qohelet: approach to reconciling contradictions in Ecclesiastes, 131–41; initiated and written before Lavater affair, 13; Jubilee edition inclusion of, 14; marginalized in modern academic literature, 12, 15–16, 18n75; reconfiguration of traditional chapter and verse division in, 115, 139–40, 167, 194; R. Jacob Meklenburg's use of the introduction to, 9; secondary literature, 121; the text, its publication history, and scholarly influence of, 116–21; translated selections, 123–218. *See also* Ecclesiastes; Mendelssohn's Hebrew writings
Meklenburg, Jacob Zvi, 9, 119–20
Melekh, Solomon. *See* Ibn Melekh, Solomon
memory/remembering, 68n9, 81, 206, 230, 371–72, 480, 482, 485
Menasseh b. Israel, 288
Mendelssohn, Joseph, 5–6, 18
Mendelssohn, Moses: brief biography, 2–4; overview of the Hebrew writings, 1–2; recent scholarship on, 18–19; scholarly biographies of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, 8–9, 12–13, 15–18. *See also* Mendelssohn's German writings; Mendelssohn's Hebrew writings
Mendelssohn, Saul, 292, 296
Mendelssohn-Bartholdy, Felix, 5–6
Mendelssohn Bible. See *Sefer Netivot ha-Shalom*
Mendelssohn's German writings: *Abhandlung über die Evidenz*, 7n16, 16, 441n60; *Gesammelte Schriften* (1843–45), 5–7; *Jerusalem, or On Religious Power and Judaism,* 3, 16, 17n70, 59, 63, 239, 300n5, 360n18, 401n46, 421–22n78, 436n40, 448n36, 469n19; Jubilee edition of Hebrew writings and, 13–14; *Morgenstunden (Morning Hours),* 4, 7n16; *Phädon*, 3, 7n16, 112–13, 114, 119n51, 130n29, 172n11; *Philosophische Gespräche*, 7n16, 16, 23n1, 441n60
Mendelssohn's Hebrew writings: Germanifying myth and marginalization of, 4–9, 12–13, 14, 15–18; Jubilee edition and, 13–14; overview, 1–2; Psalms translation, 4, 5, 8, 19, 113n13, 239
men/man: contrivances of, 182–83, 312; foolishness as a cause of sin, 151, 179–80; God having given a mind to comprehend, 70–71, 73; God made men upright, 182; precept to love your fellow man as you love yourself, 471–73; rejoicing in his good deeds, 166, 167. *See also* wisdom; women/woman
Men of the Great Assembly, 257, 258, 265, 280
Me'or 'Enayim. See Rossi, Azariah de'
merriment: anger versus levity and, 134–37; contradictions in Ecclesiastes regarding, 133–34, 139–40, 153–54; enjoyed by the living, 198–99. *See also* joy
mezuzah, 388–89, 482
Michaelis, Johann David, 264n22, 290n83, 468n18
midrashic interpretation: Ashkenazic preference for the study of, 109; Mendelssohn's identification with second intended meaning of Scripture, 111, 125–29, 130, 133–34, 224–25, 227, 293–94, 301, 341, 383. See also *derash/derush* interpretation

Millot Ha-Higgayon (Maimonides): authorship disputed, 53n1; medieval and early modern study of, 53–54; medieval characteristics, 55; notes to the translation of, 64; text and publication history, 60, 74. See also *Be'ur Millot Ha-Higgayon*; Maimonides
Mirabeau, Comte de, 4
miracles, 85, 308, 336, 339, 406, 450, 485–87
Miscellany of Hebrew Literature, 237
Mizrahi, Elijah, 74, 231, 323, 365n44, 369, 411n26, 430n3, 433n23
Montesquieu, 110
moral vices and virtues, 102–3
Moscato, Judah, 247n39, 249n47, 250n54, 344n1
Moses: anger over the golden calf, 405–28; asking to behold the Glory of the Eternal, 437–38; burning bush, 325–34; chastising Aaron for building the golden calf, 420–22; in the Designated-Tent, 432–34, 461–62, 463–65; the Glory of God reflected in the face of, 459–60, 462; God speaking Hebrew to, 246–53; leading the Israelites to the promised land, 429–41, 449; at Mount Sinai, 353–56, 405–29; prayer on behalf of the Israelites, 412–16, 436, 443–44, 449; punished for failing to sanctify God, 483–84; receives second set of tablets from God, 442–62; receiving the Torah from God, 84, 241–46, 253; transmission of the Torah to Joshua, 84, 245, 253, 264, 269; writing the Torah in the third person, 226, 243–44; writing the Torah without vocalization, cantillation, or spaces, 263–64, 267–68, 269
Moses b. Nahman (Ramban; Nahmanides): on the chronological organization of Scripture, 415n51, 465; on the Samaritan script, 263; as a source for Mendelssohn's exegesis (selected examples), 227, 231, 280, 293, 305n4, 311–12, 319–20, 333n47, 338–41, 358, 361, 364, 366n50, 370n74, 383n9, 405, 416, 423, 450n48, 455n73, 466, 472n1, 487; Torah written in the third person, 244
"Moses Mendelssohn Kommission," 13–14
Moses of Coucy, 231
Moses of Dessau (Mendelssohn's Hebrew penname), 2, 12
Mount Sinai: incident of the golden calf, 405–28; Israelites encamped around, 353–56

Nahmanides. *See* Moses b. Nahman
natural religion, 114
natural science: Maimonides on the, 98, 99–100; Mendelssohn's commentary on, 100
natural speech, 124–25
Nervensaft (nervous fluid), 67
Noah, 249, 250, 361
Norzi, Yedidya Solomon, 294
Numbers: contents of the, 241; *Sefer Netivot ha-Shalom* selections from, 478–84

Obadiah of Bertinoro, 250, 254
obedience: to the law, 130, 187, 355–56, 374, 378, 379, 450–62; to king's command, 185–87; mercy shown to those who love and show God their, 367–68; and worship of God, 46–47
Onqelos (Targum), 19, 116, 224, 225, 227, 281, 287; avoidance of divine corporeality, 274; differentiated from Aqilas, 278; differentiated from Jonathan b. Uzziel, 279; failure to distinguish between the names of God, 309; genesis of translation by, 277; Mendelssohn's use of (selected examples), 312–13, 326, 354, 367, 384, 388–89, 392–93, 408, 424, 430, 433, 439–40, 461, 476, 491; as

Onqelos (*continued*)
model of translation, 273–74. See also Targum Jonathan; *Targum Yerushalmi*
oppressed: bring oppressors to judgment, 168; weeping without comfort, 167, 168, 169
Or li-Netivah (Introduction to *Sefer Netivot ha-Shalom*): on cantillation and vocalization of Torah script, 252–53, 263–70; God speaking to his prophets in Hebrew, 246–53; on the historical need for biblical translations, 271–76; on the history of biblical translations, 276–89; on the integrity of the Hebrew text of the Torah, 241–70; on the need for a German translation, 289–93

PaRDeS, as a rubric for biblical interpretation, 110, 123
Pentateuch: differences in the Samaritan and masoretic versions, 226, 261–63, 286; on the historical translations of, 271–89; on the need for new German translation, 222–25, 289–93; on the perfect preservations of, 241–70. *See also* Hebrew Bible; *Sefer Netivot ha-Shalom*
peshaṭ (plain-sense) interpretation: and the *beʾur ha-millot* to Ecclesiastes, 112; contradiction and divergence with regard to rabbinic teachings, 227–28, 293–94, 382–83; identified as natural speech, 124–25; Mendelssohn's effort to reconcile *derash/derush* with, 13, 109, 111–16, 119, 123–29, 293–94, 382–83; and philosophical commentary in *Megillat Qohelet*, 109, 111–16, 119, 130–35, 140; as primary intended meaning of Scripture, 111, 123–25. *See also* Jewish exegetical tradition; meaning; Scripture; Torah
philosophical commentary: decline of interest in, 109–10; and *peshaṭ*, 109, 111–16, 119, 130–35. See also *beʾur ha-ṭeʿamim*
philosophies: differences between Enlightenment and Aristotelianism, 60; Leibnizian-Wolffian, 54, 114; as love of wisdom, 99; Maimonides on classification of, 98. *See also* Aristotle; Leibniz, Gottfried Wilhelm; Wolff, Christian
Philo, 283
Plato, 3, 112, 113, 285
Plungian, Mordechai, 119
Pocock, Edward, 286n57, 287n63
poetic syllogisms, 88, 90, 91
poetry. *See* biblical poetry
politics: on political governance, 59, 86, 97, 101–5, 174, 177–79, 185–86, 188, 197, 438, 488–92; sovereignty and authority, 115, 185–87; the Torah and political realities of exile, 59. *See also* authority; governance
Preston, Theodore, 121
Prince and the Ascetic, 49
procreation: Adam and Eve engaged in, 312
promised land: as land of milk and honey, 450; Moses and Aaron forbidden to enter the, 483–84; Moses leading the Israelites to the, 429–41
Proops, Joseph, 289
prophets: false prophets, 485, 487; God speaking in Hebrew to his, 28, 246–53; Maimonides on two kinds of prophetic parables, 212–13; prophetic speech, 126; signs or miracles from, 485–87
propositions: apodictic, 86, 91; first intelligibles, 79, 82–83, 85, 86, 90, 91; generally accepted opinions, 79–80, 83–84, 85, 88, 90, 91; Maimonides explanation of self-evident, 79–80, 85–86, 90; secondary intelligibles, 86, 87–91; sense perceptions, 79–82, 90, 91; traditions, 80, 84–85, 90, 91. *See also* syllogisms; truth

providence, 25, 31–35, 36–40, 68–69, 88, 112–13, 135–36, 152, 165, 184, 194, 200, 202, 291, 304, 308, 331, 333, 340
Psalms: and biblical poetry, 346, 349, 351
Ptolemy, 281–83, 284–85
Ptolomaeus Lâgos, 282
punctuation, 39–40. *See also* cantillation
punishment: hearts emboldened to do evil in absence of, 191–92; of Moses and Aaron, 483–84; of the nation for turning its back on God, 476–77; for sin of the golden calf, 420, 423–24, 427–28
Purmann, Johann Georg, 121

qere/ketiv, 197–98, 211–12, 269–70
Qohelet Musar: cessation of publication, 26; Euchel's mention of, 5; influence on the *Haskalah*, 25–26; marginalization at the hand of modern scholars, 12–13, 15–17; the text and its publication history, 26–27; translated selections, 28–49

Rabe, Johann Jacob, 115, 120–21
Radaq. *See* Kimhi, David
Ramban. *See* Moses b. Nahman
Rashbam. *See* Samuel b. Meir
Rashi. *See* Solomon b. Isaac
reason: definition and meaning of, 403. *See also* logic; knowledge
Rehoboam, 174
Reimarus, Hermann Samuel, 8
remez (mode of interpretation), 123, 128
Re'shit Hokhmah (study society), 11
reward and punishment, 31–35, 36–39, 163, 167, 168–69, 180–83, 190–94, 195–97, 201–3, 322–24, 476–77, 478–79
rhetorical syllogisms, 88, 89, 90, 91
righteous: rewarded in the world-to-come, 163, 169, 202; uncertain fate in this world, 177, 192, 196. *See also* good/goodness
Rosenzweig, Franz, 225, 239
Rossi, Azariah de', 226, 240, 264, 266–67, 277–78, 280, 285, 347–50; *Hadrat Zeqenim*, 282–84
Rousseu, Jean-Jacques, 56, 469n19

Saadya Gaon, 113, 224, 266, 286–88, 386
Sabbath: commandment to remember it and keep it holy, 371–72, 374; laws pertaining to, 130, 395; as sign of binding between God and Israel, 378
sacrifices: laws pertaining to, 399–400, 451, 457–58; in worshipping the golden calf, 409–10
Sages: on aging, 207, 311; on the arrangement of the Ten Commandments on the two tablets, 376–77, 379; on the difficulties posed by the book of Ecclesiastes, 112, 131, 133, 137; on good and evil, 31–35, 36–39, 95, 160, 180, 322; on the interpretation of Scripture, 124, 126, 128, 129, 382; on love and fear of God, 47, 161; on Noahides and monotheism, 361–62; on the preservation of the Torah in antiquity, 245, 246–47, 254–55, 257, 259–60, 265, 269, 270; on the reasons for the commandments, 401, 466; on translations of the Torah in antiquity, 257, 276, 277, 281–82, 284. See also *derash/derush* interpretation; midrashic interpretation
Samaritan Pentateuch: deviations from masoretic text, 226, 262–63; script used in, 254–56, 258–63
Samuel b. Meir (Rashbam): Mendelssohn's use of extant manuscripts, 230, 295, 424; as a source for Mendelssohn's exegesis (selected examples), 74, 227, 231, 293, 301n9, 327–30, 362n30, 382–83, 385, 395, 431, 461
Sandler, Peretz, 237
Sandmel, David, 237
Satanow, Isaac, 62

Schmid, Anton, 233
Schorch, Grit, 19
science: art of logic as an instrument of, 101; divine, 98; mathematics, 82, 86, 87, 98, 99; natural, 98, 99–100. *See also* logic
Scripture: decline of philosophical study of, 109–10; Enlightenment approach to study of, 110, 223–24, 290–91. *See also* Christian biblical interpretation; *derash/derush* interpretation; Jewish exegetical tradition; *peshaṭ* (plain-sense) interpretation; Sages
secondary intelligibles, 86, 87–91
Sefer ha-Bahir, 266
Sefer ha-Ḥinnukh, 358
Sefer ha-Kavvanot, 67
Sefer Miṣvot Qatan, 358
Sefer Netivot ha-Shalom: dissemination and popularity, 4, 9–12, 232–35; early reception among Christian scholars, 4, 235–36; editions, 11–12, 232–35; editors' introduction, 221–40; genesis and organization of this edition, 291–93, 296–97; Jubilee edition inclusion of, 14; marginalization in academic Jewish writings, 8, 12–13, 15–18; Mendelssohn's collaborators, 291–97; translations in modern European languages, 19, 236–37; translated selections (*Or li-Netivah*), 241–302, (Genesis), 303–24, (Exodus), 325–470, (Leviticus), 471–77, (Numbers), 478–84, (Deuteronomy), 485–92. *See also* Mendelssohn's Hebrew writings; translations
Sefer Yeṣirah, 28–29, 146, 314n17
Seligmann of Königsberg, 295
Semler, Johann, 226n22, 264n124
sense perceptions: description of, 80; indicating presence of an external body, 80–81; propositions of, 79–82, 90, 91
Seow, C. L., 121
Sephardic Jewry: cultural heritage of, 26, 53; study of the Bible and Hebrew, 109
Septuagint, 281, 282n42, 285, 286, 288
sexual desire, 159, 180, 210, 312, 315–16
Sforno, Obadiah, 166n29, 195n3, 231, 355–56, 374–75
Shalom of Mezhirech, 297
Sheol, 32, 138, 197, 199, 201
Sherira Gaon, 260
shittuf (associative deity), 362–63, 378, 409, 411
sign or miracle, 485–87
Simon, Richard, 110
sin: of Adam and Eve, 313–16, 318–19, 321–22; definition and meaning of, 447; foolishness (*sikhlut*) as a source of, 179–80; golden calf, 405–28; of parents visited on the children, 447, 448, 476–77. *See also* transgressions (*'avon*)
sinners: shown forbearance by God, 190–92; similarities between the righteous and, 196. *See also* evil; wicked
ṣiṣit (fringes), 480–82
skilled artistry and craftwork, 98, 403–4, 467–69. *See also* luxury
slaves/slavery: Israelites as slaves in Egypt, 29n14, 275, 331n42, 363–64, 455; laws pertaining to Israelite slaves, 384–89
Society for Hebrew Literature, 237
sod (mode of interpretation), 123, 128
Sofer, Moses, 11–12
Solomon: as author of Ecclesiastes, 112, 119n52, 142, 181; his wisdom and knowledge, 151–52, 213; suffering caused by indulging in excesses, 181–82; writing Ecclesiastes as a philosophical dialogue, 113, 116, 132–33, 161–62. *See also* kings/kingship
Solomon b. Isaac (Rashi): added to later editions of *Sefer Netivot ha-Shalom*, 10, 233–34; exegetical method of, 125, 127, 466; on the Greek translation of the

seventy-two elders, 281; Mendelssohn's use of Rashi manuscripts, 230, 295–96, 411, 415; on Mosaic authorship of the last eight verses of Deuteronomy, 243; on Onqelos as translator, 273; on the original script of the Torah, 254–56, 258; as a source for Mendelssohn's exegesis (selected examples), 112–13, 140, 227, 231, 293, 295, 308n5, 337, 368–69, 383–87, 392–93, 426, 433, 455–56, 476; on the Talmudic dictum "restrain your children from *higgayon*," 29–30, 57, 69; widespread study of, 11, 227, 288n71
song of David, 349
song of Deborah, 349
sophistic syllogisms, 87, 89–90, 91
Sorkin, David, 64, 121, 238
soul: art of logic guiding the intelligent, 97–98, 101–2; connected to other souls by love, 478–79; providence and immortality of the, 114, 163, 167–69, 200, 202–3, 213–14
Spanish Pentateuch, 288–89
speech: external, 29–30, 57, 66–68; internal, 29–30, 57, 66–68, 97–98; on parts of speech, 299–302; on qualities of natural speech, 123–28. *See also* Hebrew language; languages
Spinoza, Baruch, 4, 19, 110, 111n8, 128n22, 226, 244n22
Stanislawski, Michael, 238
strangers (foreigners): biblical treatment of, 373, 395, 472, 489–90
Strauss, Leo, 63
syllogisms: analogical, 91; composed of three propositions, 79–88; demonstrative, 79, 88, 90, 91; dialectical, 89, 91; inductive, 90–91; logic used to construct, 71, 79; poetic, 88, 90, 91; rhetorical, 88, 89, 90, 91; sophistic, 87, 89–90, 91. *See also* propositions; truth
Tabernacle: Bezalel and the construction of, 402–4; purpose of, 465–70. *See also* Designated-Tent
tablets: arrangement of the Ten Commandments on, 376–77, 379–80, 416–17; on differences between the Decalogue in Exodus and Deuteronomy, 379–81; Moses and the second set, 442–62; Moses' destruction of, 419. *See also* Ten Commandments
Talmud: Ashkenazic curriculum focused on, 3; usefulness of logic in study of, 73. *See also* Sages
Tanenbaum, Moses, 11
Targum Jonathan, 227, 278–81, 374, 388–89, 394–95, 403, 424, 431, 433, 437, 449, 454, 456, 461
Targum Onqelos. *See* Onqelos (Targum)
Targum Yerushalmi (or *Targum Ereṣ Yisraʾel*), 280, 444, 448, 461
ṭefilin, 482
Ten Commandments: arrangement on the tablets, 376–77, 379–80, 416–17; on differences between Exodus and Deuteronomy, 379–81; Mendelssohn's introduction to, 357–63
tent (*ohel moʾed*). *See* Designated-Tent
theodicy, 31–39, 44–46; Leibnizian-Wolffian conception of, 54, 114; Mendelssohn's view of, 31–39, 44–46
Tiqqun Soferim, 228, 233, 294, 295, 296, 297
Toledot Adam, 119
Töplitz, Teodor, 11
Torah: biblical poetry, 344–52; history of translations of, 271–90; included in the Alexandrian Library, 282–86; king commanded to read, 488, 491–92; Mendelssohn on Christian translations of, 290–91; multiple modes of interpretation, 123–29; oral tradition of, 84–85; significance of Hebrew names, 249–51; translation into Aramaic, 257–58, 268,

Torah (*continued*)
276–77, 286; unadulterated transmission and preservation of the, 226, 241–70; written in third person, 242–44. *See also* cantillation; *derash/derush* interpretation; Hebrew language; midrashic interpretation; *peshaṭ* (plain-sense) interpretation; translations
Tosafot, 73, 217n6, 258, 281n40, 362n28
traditions, oral: definition of, 84; logical propositions related to, 80, 84–85, 90, 91; need for, 71; reliability of transmission, 58–59, 84–85
transgressions (*'avon*): definition and meaning of, 446; of parents visited on children, 447–48, 476–77. *See also* sin
translations: biblical translations history of, 274–89; challenges of, 271–74; Christian translations of Scripture, 290–91; linguistic challenges of, 48–50, 271–74; Mendelssohn's dissatisfaction with existing Pentateuch translations, 289–90; Mendelssohn's German translation of the Pentateuch, 222–25, 291–94. *See also* Onqelos (Targum); Targum Jonathan
tree of knowledge of good and evil, 311–19, 321–22
tree of life, 310–11, 317–19, 324
truth: Aristotle on using logic to guide inquiry for, 72; learning to distinguish from falsehood, 70–75, 77–78; misleading nature of the senses, 81, 87; from non-Jewish sources, 113–14, 140. *See also* logic; propositions; syllogisms
Tychsen, Oluf Gerhard, 262n115

universals, 68, 92–93
Usserius, Jacobus (James Ussher), 261–62

vices: intellectual, 101; moral, 102–3, 104
virtues: intellectual, 101; moral, 102–3, 104
Vital, Hayyim, 67n6
Volozhin Yeshivah, 11
vowel points (vocalization in the Torah), 116, 224, 226, 245, 253, 263–70

Walton, Brian, 254n77, 262n114, 264n122, 286n57, 287n63
Warburton, William, 481n3
Weinberg, Werner, 238
Weiss, Raymond L., 63
Wessely, Naphtali Herz, 16, 120n56, 229, 297, 471, 475
wicked: admonishment against, 176–77; and felicity in this world, 192; God's judgment of, 163–64, 169, 202–3; wickedness emerges from stupidity, 179, 181. *See also* evil; sinners
wind, 144–45, 188
wisdom: definition of, 403; differentiating it from madness and folly, 151–52; to distinguish falsehood, 72–75, 77–78; found in all sources, 113, 140; and governance, 177–78, 179; man's desire for, 70–71; Torah and oral tradition needed to acquire, 71, 72–75; vexations in pursuit of, 136–38, 151–53, 154, 177. *See also* Divine Wisdom; knowledge
Witzenhausen, Yosel, 289
wives: proscription against king taking too many wives, 488; Solomon's regret over his numerous, 181–82
Wolf, Johann Christoph, 74n30, 286n57, 289n77
Wolff, Christian, 8n22, 25–26, 33n18, 45nn11–12, 46n14, 54, 56, 83n10, 114
women/woman: and childbearing, 38; as companion, 173, 319–20; influence of foreign women, 275; intimacy with, 159, 199; laws pertaining to slave-women, 386–87; metaphor for desire, 180–81; proscription against marrying non-Israelite, 452

Worms, Anshel, 265
worship: and love of God, 46–47; prohibition to worship other Gods, 181, 331–32, 360–61, 364, 370, 396, 409, 458, 486–87

Yaffe, Martin D., 63
Yefeh To'ar, 247
Yisrael. *See* Israelites
Yom Tov ben Abraham Ishbili (Ritva), 242–43, 258–59
Young, Edward, 44n10, 50
youth, 205–6. *See also* children

Zamosc, Israel, 54, 206n5, 406n7, 419–20n70
Zohar: addressing contradictions in Ecclesiastes, 132, 137–38; Mendelssohn's use of in *Sefer Netivot ha-Shalom*, 231, 266, 305–6; on the multiple meanings of Scripture, 123n2, 128; on the vowels and the cantillation in the Torah, 266

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INDEX OF SOURCES

Verses that Mendelssohn commented on directly are indicated in **bold**.

HEBREW BIBLE

Genesis

1:1 242, 271, 281
1:1–6:8 228, 237
1:11 310
1:24 38
1:26 44, 70, 281
1:31 **303–6**
1:31 34
2:1 250
2:2 281, 285
2:3 305
2:4 127, 307–9
2:5–8 310
2:7 467
2:9 **310–16**
2:9 45
2:10 36
2:15 317
2:16–18 **317–20**
2:18 181
2:19 28
2:23 247
3:3 310
3:5 311, 312
3:16 37, 150
3:18–19 319
3:19 **321–22**
3:20 249
3:22 **323–24**
3:22 311, 313
4:1 403
4:7 46
4:8 375
4:9 253
4:10–11 251
5:2 281
6:3 36
6:13 163
7:16 425
8:2 188
9:13–15 485
9:25 143
9:27 248
10:2 279
10:20 49, 290
11:1 249
11:5 328
11:7 249, 281
11:9 249
13:3 465
14:18–20 360n20
15:10 461
15:16 367
16:10 150

Genesis (*continued*)
18:7 307
18:12 281
18:21 50
18:25 163, 186, 197
19:32 403
21:6 41
22:6 299
22:7 299
22:16 414
23:6 42
23:13 43
24:7 426
24:21 288
24:45 302
24:49 202
24:67 311
26:3 414
26:26 42
27:45 39
27:46 36, 129, 152, 153, 201
29:34 251
30:13 260
31:7 42
31:28 36
31:29 46
31:37 302
31:42 385
32:5 127
32:11 273
32:21 425
32:22 365
32:27 205
33:11 74
35:11 414
35:29 38
37:23 32
37:25 286
37:35 32
38:14 38
38:23 43
39:11 41, 319
40:13 29
41:8 474n1
41:28 47
42:7 410
42:16 45
42:23 271
43:12 43
43:14 338
44:12 38
44:18 125
44:19 387
44:30 46, 48, 140
47:9 73
47:15 449
47:18 48
48:19 31
49:6 281
49:7 31, 302
49:11 461
49:15 36, 48, 342
49:16 323
49:20 192
49:21 48
49:23 152
50:19 287–88
63 235

Exodus
2:6 318
2:13 84
2:14 42
2:25 328
3:1–15 **325–34**
3:2 200
3:3 42
3:8 426
3:12 353
3:13–14 225
3:14 341, 444
3:14–15 339
3:15 441
3:16 309
4:14 45
4:15 43
4:16 271
4:19 336, 431

4:20 281
5:2 336
5:15 336
5:20 337
5:22 337
5:22–6:9 **335–43**
5:22–23 340
6:1–2 340
6:2–3 225
6:3 224, 308
7:11 474
12:10 458
12:40 281
12:43 419
13:3 372
13:14 362
14:8 274
14:13 490
14:31 85
15 230
15:1 **344–52**, 350
15:6 255, 348
15:8 39
15:9 348
15:25 384
16:22 491
16:32 423
18:8 36, 38
18:20 43
18:21 302
18:22 48
18:23 104
18:27 296
19 238
19:1–6 **353–56**
19:3 254
19:5 342
19:5–6 360
19:9 435
19:16 359
19:19 370
20 238
20:1–14 **357–81**
20:2 338
20:3 409
20:5 447, 452
20:6 446
20:11 363
20:13 390
20:14 457, 472
20:15 84
20:18 354
21:1–6 **382–89**
21:13 393
21–23 382
22:2 384
22:19 361, 409
22:22 447
22:25 173
23:1 368
23:1–19 **390–401**
23:2 270
23:5 37, 210
23:12 373, 455
23:16 456
23:19 458
23:20 384
23:20–33 451
23:21 327, 435
23:22 392
23:24 451
23:32 452
24:5 270
24:11 281
24:12 406
24:16 354, 465
24:18 465
25:22 296, 435, 464
26:9 279
28:3 468
28:11 263
30:12 33
31:1–3 **402–4**
31:4 404
31:13 378
32:1 296
32:1–35 **405–28**
32:15 42

Exodus (*continued*)
32:16 346
32:18 42
33:1–23 **429–41**
33:3 273, 449
33:12 312
33:16 449
33:17 450
33:19 43, 333, 359, 444
33:21 443
33:23 397
34:1–35 **442–62**
34:17 364, 366
34:23 398
34:35 42
35:33 403
35:35 467, 468
40:9 113, 140
40:34 328
40:34–38 **463–70**

Leviticus
1:1 464, 465
5:5 38
6:2 400
9:1 464, 465
9:23 465
10:3 483
10:16 164
11:6 282
13:33, 42 296
13:42 296
14:22 33
18:4 401
18:5 105
19:12 337, 369
19:15 392
19:17 41
19:17–18 **471–73**
20:10 375
20:16 375
20:24 470
21 478
21:5 37
21:14 451
22:9 318
22:31 337
24:10 305
25:7 278
25:39 384
25:41 387
26:1 **474–75**
26:1 366
26:6 38
26:11 47
26:14–45 476
26:19 477
26:36 315
26:38–39 **476–77**
26:43 300
27:10 36
27:34 258

Numbers
1:18 38
3:4 365
5:14 366
5:18 421
7:89 464, 465
9:11 130
9:16 464
9:23 406
10:35–36 242
11:1 320
11:29 366
12:7 438
12:8 434
12:11 181
14:19 406
14:30 42
15:30–31 **478–79**
15:37–40 **480–82**
15:39 43, 206
16:14 394
16:15 281, 285
16:26 32, 37
16:28 43, 405
16:30 34, 197

17:11 412
18:16 455
18:24 140
20:12 **483–84**
21:5 175
21:9 247, 251
21:24 274
21:32 457
21–27 177
22:18 130
22:28 396
22:30 39
23:13 44
24:1 273
24:19 279
24:24 279
28:26 398
30:13 50
31:14 32
32:12 424
32:14 422
33:1 465
35:16–18 375
36:13 241

Deuteronomy
1:9 297
1:12 484
1:17 388
1:27 32
2:15 38, 164
2:24, 31 457
3:25 457
4:6 264
4:10 371
4:12 253, 371
4:14 254
4:19 282
4:19–20 362
4:20 363
4:28 406, 408
4:40 38
4:44 241
5:4 434
5:6 338
5:12 124, 371, 379
5:14 381
5:15 363, 455
5:17 380
5:18 124, 380
5:19 370, 377
6:6 298
6:7 253
6:14 361
6:24 35
7:6 467
7:8 363
7:9 245
7:15 37
9:7 372
10:3–4 459
10:8 424
10:17 362
11:19 30
11:21 270
12:5 42
12:10 469
12:28 190, 292
13:2 **485–87**
13:6 32
13:7 31, 38, 39
13:15 390
14:1–2 483
14:25 490
15:8 34
15:10 39
15:12 384
15:17 388
16:19 180
17:3 282
17:10 392
17:14–20 **488–92**
17:17 182
17:18 255
17:19 264
19:17 388
21:11 199
21:16 288

Deuteronomy (*continued*)
22:2 395, 456
23:11–12 461
24:16 477
25:1 163
25:3 37
26:2 400
26:17 241
26:19 44, 361
27:4 262
27:8 263, 267, 434
27:19 391
28:29 71
28:33 169
28:43 44
28:50 421
28:56 33, 38
28:58 369
28:59 32, 37
29:7 38
29:12 362n30
29:17 192
29:18 45, 199, 470
29:21 34, 38
31:6 38
31:17 37, 129
31:19 292
31:21 245, 270
31:24 244
31:26 242
31:26 244, 245
31:27 43
31:28 241
32:2 90
32:4 163, 168, 202
32:7–8 372
32:20 348
32:24 46
32:28 38
32:34 301
32:36 392
32:39 333, 444
32:47 128
32:51 484
33:4 105, 361
33:9 424
34:4 242, 243
34:5 242, 420
34:7 450
34:8 449
34:10 338, 340
34:12 242

Joshua
1:8 66, 492
1:18 187
2:19 37
3:15 145
6:20 32
14:7 359
15:19 211
17:14 263
23:6 291
23:7 396

Judges
2:18 388
3:25 405
3:30 186
4:9 42
4:18 326
5:6 182
5:16 48
5:19 302
5:28 405
5:30 156
5:31 302
9:16 436
11:35 37
20:3 28
20:16 447

1 Samuel
1:18 437
1:22 398
1:23 32
2:3 34
3:17 45

3:38 125
8:7 489
8:22 489
9:17 186
9:21 490
10:6 346
14:43 70
14:47 176
17:8 164
17:45 34
18:17 315
19:5 84
20:18 42, 48
22:8 215
22:14 42, 196
24:12 43
25:6 31, 43, 50, 75
25:29 130
26:9–10 187
26:10 188, 427
30:16 198, 396

2 Samuel
2:14 434
3:1 163
3:25 41
7:12 39
7:14 187
8:18 356
10:12 376
15:12 46
18:18 371
18:22 38
19:36 311
23:1 185, 246
23:2 105
23:5 143

1 Kings
1:40 42
2:19 426
2:42 38, 318
4:20 470
5:5 470
5:12 216
5:29 210
6:36 45
7:15 408
8:11 464
8:52 333
8:61 72
10:12 470
10:16–18 470
10:21 470
10:29 490
11 174
11:3 181
11:4 181
12:33 308
14:15 38
19:13 43
20:18 272
20:40 41
21:19 375
22:4 196
22:20 36

2 Kings
2:10 200
3:7 446
4:1 39
4:7 39
4:12, 25 434
4:13 37, 38
4:23 372
5:3 413
5:18 42
8:22 446
17:9 32, 308
18:28 42
22:5 50
23:25 265
25:7 31

Isaiah
1:6 38
1:18 37
1:21 375

Isaiah (*continued*)
1:25 45
2:6 223, 351
2:16 45, 171
2:20 46
3:1 268
3:3 31
3:6 381
3:9 43
3:10 202
4:3 426
5:7 251
5:12 73, 346
5:13 42
6:4 42
6:10 43
7:14 485
8:1 408
8:4 38
8:9 43
8:22 31, 204
9:1 202
9:4 31
9:6 407
10:6 32
10:7 298
10:13 71
10:16 46
10:22 202
11:2 403
11:11 50
13:8 38
13:22 337
14:2 33
14:6 32
14:21 367
17:7 29
17:11 37
17:13 29, 39
18:3 73
19:3 46
19:4 387
19:11 45
21:2 163
22:13 198
24:20 39
25:7 42
28:1 28, 45
28:7 30
28:10 30
28:12 47, 71
28:15 29
29:6 67
29:11 253
29:21 30
31:4 37, 484
32:15 44, 409
32:17 104
32:20 188
33:14 208
33:15 178
33:16 201
33:17 489
33:22 363
34:16 49
35:10 32
37:19 364
38:17 33
40:19 211
40:26 359
41:7 33
41:20 284
41:23 485
41:26 39
42:13 42
42:18 30
42:22 201
43:4 297
43:7 307–8
44:5 203
44:18 29, 45
45:17 202
48:4 29
48:8 38
48:22 130
49:4 42, 143

50:2 32, 34, 48
50:4 48
50:5 140
50:10 187, 202
51:17 36
52:3 386
52:11 43
52:13 44
52:14 37
53:4 197
53:6 105
54:6 38
54:8 438
54:10 72
56:4 331n41
56:6 331n41
56:7 445
56:10 30
56:11 178
57:1 163, 290
57:2 182
57:14 140
57:20 130
58:1 43
58:4 36
58:6 131
58:8 205
58:11 71, 201
58:13 372
59:3 66
59:13 30
59:21 245
61:6 356
61:10 33, 202
63:1 43
63:7 39, 203
63:9 33, 333
63:10 32, 34
64:3 466
65:20 461
66:2 381
66:10 44
66:24 273

Jeremiah
1:5 402
1:11 263
2:5 197
2:13, 19 201
2:13 275
2:19 37
2:22 164
2:27 379
2:30 30, 41
3:14 41
4:12 39
4:22 403
6:4 42
6:13 160, 185
6:16 154, 202, 466
8:16 42
9:20 31
9:22 45
10:10 360
10:11 34
11:4 355
11:20 186
12:1 163
12:6 43
14:9 202
14:19 202
15:5 201
15:17 48
16:19 262
17:9 272
20:9 42
21:12 84
22:15 178
23:9 43
23:18 34
23:31 30
23:36 123, 126, 291
29:2 276
29:28 336
31:12 329
31:15 48
32:33 223

Jeremiah (*continued*)
36:5 42, 244
36:18 242
42:3 42
45:3, 4:20 37
48:11 49
48:36 39
50:17 105
51:6 32

Ezekiel
1:12 105
2:10 50
7:4 33
7:26 37
8:12 45
13:18 180
14:17 32
16:6 33
16:8 268
16:32 375
18:17ff 367
18:18 187
18:20 196
20:7 412
20:32 223, 224, 290, 302
21:20 32
21:31 29
22:7 374
24:16 39
26:7 143
26:20 39
33:12 192
37:4–5 252
37:17 49
40:5 41
43:11 37
44:18 321

Hosea
2:21 447
4:2 199
4:7 31, 412
5:13 30
6:1 34
7:16 185
9:10 34
11:7 185
12:2 149

Joel
2:16 37
2:22 38
2:24 398
4:4 32
4:10 173

Amos
2:16 37
4:2 32
5:7 223
5:8 32, 145
7:13 45
8:12 223, 290
9:11 268

Obadiah
1:3 37, 43
1:5 31
1:7 37, 48
1:16 198

Jonah
1:12 193
4:3 129, 426
4:9 28
4:10 434
4:11 477

Micah
2:8 31
2:10 276
4:9 418
7:18 34

Nahum 3:2 43

Habakkuk
1:13 136, 163, 168
2:19 66
3:2 348
3:4 459

Zephaniah
1:14 41
3:9 356

Zechariah
2:12 33
4:2 211
4:5 481
4:6 44
5:1 42
8:19 302
9:1 296, 368
9:12 255
11:12 43
12:1 368
13:6 33
14:12 50

Malachi
1:1 368
1:9 37
1:11 360
3:5 391

Psalms
2:10 42
4:4 32
4:8 43, 45
5:12 47
6:9 326
7:10 428
7:16 69
9:17 68
9:18 197
16:4 37, 368
16:8 48
17:2 41
18:36 297
18:40 141
19:2 360
19:4 360
19:5 360
19:8 361n22
19:10 123, 466
20:6 39
21:3 39
22:8 454
23:2 43
23:3 71
25:6 372
27:2 71
27:11 71
27:13 322
30:6 43, 438
31:11 37
31:20 44, 47
32:2 484n6
32:6 31
32:8 47
33:5 163, 202
34:1 43
34:15 136, 192
35:14 143
36:10 294
37:3 149
37:7 187
37:14 299–300
37:23 141
37:30 41, 66
38:5 43
38:11 37
38:23 37
39:2 43
40:5 170n2, 223
40:6 44
41:9 186
42:8 59
42:10 300
44:18 33
44:22 412

Psalms (*continued*)
45:3 277
46:3 483
48:8 31
49:4 66
49:11 31
49:13 44, 319
49:14 31
50:2 44
50:8 44
50:21 43
51:13 436
55:8 48
55:9 39
55:15 44
55:20 334
55:23 379
56:12 31
56:14 37
58:5–6 32
58:11 43
58:12 202
66:10 197
68:3 29
69:3 316
71:18 37, 301
73:4 38
73:8 39
73:9 308
73:28 478
77:13 66
78:4 43
78:7 31, 32, 34
78:29 46, 489
78:41 32
82:1 388
83:4 177
84:3 48
87:3 46
88:1 418
88:7 31
89:22 30
90:4 41
90:10 201
90:17 31
92:7 68
92:8 69
92:16 461
94:8 42
98:3 446
102:1 276
102:4 198
103:5 33
103:11 351
103:17 44, 94
103:20 43
104:10 145
104:12 44
104:15 42
104:31 33
104:34 38, 44, 202
106:16 407
106:20–21 409
106:48 203
107:8 39
107:9 71
107:43 44
109:18 43
110:7 38
111:4 33
111:10 471
114:1 275
114:4 44
115:7 66
118:21–29 351
118:23 44, 268
118:27 397
119:5 413
119:14 44
119:140 140
120:3 38
122:4 250
126:2 42
127:4 173
129:1 386
131:2 46

133:1 36, 43, 48
139:2 217
139:9 49
139:12 196
139:17 248
140:11 71, 180
141:4 31
143:5 66
144:3 312
144:4 192
144:14 39
145:8–9 202
145:17 176
148:10 44
148:14 362, 467
149:8 180
150:5 162

Proverbs
1:2 290
1:4 38
1:5 217
1:6 30, 292
1:13 302
1:17 72, 420
1:18 36
1:20 349
1:21 43
1:22 43
2:3 43
3:4 140, 336
4:26 39
5:19 33
6:15 187
7:9 308
7:12 43
7:18 48, 479
7:23 46
7:26 469
8:8 72
8:9 48, 131, 136, 370
8:34 72, 73, 268
9:4 38, 39
11:4 69
11:13 360
11:24 467
13:19 489
15:30 57
16:4 32
16:7 48
16:11 132
16:15 492
16:20 33
16:21 48, 301
16:24 216
16:32 38
17:12 38
17:14 454
18:8 33
18:23 178
18:24 296
19:6 413
21:1 43, 340
21:5 37
22:6 69
22:15 41
22:18 298
22:20 297
22:27 32
23:1 46
23:20 42
24:5 297
24:16 38
25:4 45
25:11 190
25:20 30, 48
26:18–19 136
27:5 302
28:17 32
29:9 32
29:11 32
29:18 421
30:17 440
30:18 38
31:4 42
31:30 201

Job
1:1 36
1:5 433
1:11 364
2:3 33
2:10 36
2:11 34
3:1, 5 129
3:12 33
3:22 30, 44
3:26 46
4:2 31
4:19 95
5:8 47
5:16 461
5:20 339
5:27 46
6:6 252
6:10 34
6:12 33
6:15 43
6:21 209
6:28 49, 50, 364
7:6 129, 201
7:15 33, 201
8:10 140
10:3 32
10:17 333
11:4 292
11:8 43
11:12 37
12:3 43
12:5 290
12:23–24 73
13:4 159
14:1 149, 201
14:15 33
14:20 173
15:4 210
15:14 135
15:17 430
15:29 31
16:17 84
18:4 34
19:18 461
20:3 69
20:8 192, 197
20:23 42
20:29 48
21:8 31
22:28 95
23:10 34
24:25 32
27:2 32
27:4 66
31:2 339
33:6 36
33:14 434
33:23 136
34:29 188
35:11 201
36:3 194, 418
36:7 186
37:2 66
37:16 467
37:21 31
38:6 45
38:11 470
38:13 43
38:41 44
39:21 42
41:4 273
41:12 42
41:16 33

Song of Songs
2:9 336
3:4 46
4:5 380
4:6 41
5:1 42
5:14 377
5:16 293
6:2 42
7:4 377
7:12–13 43
7:13 39, 209
8:2 43

8:6–7 71

Ruth 1:17 46

Lamentations
1:10 31
1:14 37
1:19 43
1:22 37
2:4 31, 32
2:19 39
3:4 37
3:12 200
3:14 43
3:23 175
3:26 36
3:27 36
3:36 32
3:38 95
3:39 39
4:5 198
4:7 32
4:16 29
4:18 37, 39
4:21 44

Ecclesiastes
1:1–11 **142–47**
1:6 212
1:11 139
1:12 139, 142, 148
1:12–2:11 **148–57**
1:13 148–49
1:14 201
1:15 290, 302
1:17 149
1:18 154
2:1 42
2:1–2 133
2:2 42, 47, 133, 137
2:8 31, 37, 43, 355
2:9 71
2:11 129
2:12 139
2:13 31, 137
2:14 46, 49, 484n1
2:17 38
2:21 159, 376
2:25 33
2:26 139
3:1 138–39
3:1–4:3 **158–69**
3:10 148
3:11 143, 184
3:13 35, 160
3:16 133
3:17 168, 202
3:18 34
3:19 44, 129, 132, 133, 318
3:20 467
3:21 128
4:1 129, 133, 167
4:2 138
4:2–3 129
4:3 129, 139
4:4 139, 182, 469
4:4–16 **170–75**
4:5 32
4:6 322
4:7 31
4:16 139
4:17 139
5:5 33
5:7 135, 202
5:15–16 127
5:17 137
5:19 139
6:1 140
6:4 302
6:8 135, 137
6:10 34
7:1 129
7:2 137
7:3 131, 133, 135
7:8 136
7:9 135, 136
7:10 39
7:14 138, 140

Ecclesiastes (*continued*)
7:15 138, 140, 163, 201
7:15–8:9 **176–89**
7:18 178, 281
7:24 152
7:29 312, 315
8:1 267, 275
8:1–9 184–89
8:9 37, 140
8:10 140
8:10–9:12 **190–203**
8:12 139
8:13 138
8:14 139
8:15 133, 137
9:2 31
9:4 31, 129
9:11 34, 484n1
9:12 140
9:13 140
9–12 195–203
10:4 31
10:15 140
10:16 140
10:19 154
11:6 140, 205
11:7 32, 140
11:7–12:7 **204–14**
11:8 150
11:10 135, 136
12:1–7 207–14
12:5 38, 129
12:7 140, 339
12:8 140
12:8–12:14 **215–18**
12:11 253, 346, 467
12:12 105, 298, 301
12:13 147, 162
12:14 133, 168

Esther
1:8 290
1:10 42
1:20 191
1:22 249
4:2 336
4:3 186
4:14 32
5:9 208
6:12 32
7:4 29, 32
7:7 41
8:5 292
9:26 28
9:28 41

Daniel
1:10 42
4:14 197
4:29 490
5:5–8 257
5:8 254, 255
5:25 255
10:8 37
11:16 274
12:7 343

Ezra
2:64–65 275
4:4 256
4:7 255, 256, 271
4:9–10 256
4:18 255
4:23 256
7:6 254
7:10 255
8:18 383
9:3 37
9:4 32

Nehemiah
2:2 34
3:8 392
4:1 38
8:7 268
8:8 33, 257, 265, 268, 276, 277, 291
9:13 470

13:11 268
13:14 297
13:23–24 275
13:24 276

1 Chronicles
4:40 44
9:33 454
10:12 386
11:22 314
16:4 371
19:13 44
25:3 276, 448
26:28 164
29:17 164
29:25 188

2 Chronicles
1:4 164
1:15 470
1:18 470
6:29 276
10:15 268
18:23 41
19:6 388
21:10 446
23:8 454
25:16 392
28:15 33
30:10 41
32:21 361

RABBINIC SOURCES

Mishnah

Berakhot 9:5 36

Sheqalim 6:1 416

Megillah 1:8 277n22

Sanhedrin 7:6 364n39

Shevuʿot 3:8 369n64

ʿAvodah Zarah
2:5 268n142

Avot
1:17 217n9
2:1 177n5
2:12 470n23
3:1 199n14, 201n24, 206n7
3:9 315n20
3:14 355n10
3:15 323n3
3:18 72n20
4:13 315n21
4:22 199n14, 201n24, 206n7
5:11–12 171n3
5:16 46n14

Tosefta

Megillah 3:41 274

Sotah 6:2 350n36

Mekhilta d'Rabbi Yishmaʿel

Bo
5 29n5, 250n56, 274n14
14 282

Shirah
1 351

Yitro (Ba-Ḥodesh)
5 363–64n36
6 364n40, 365n42, 366n52
7 373nn87, 91
8 376–77n105

Mishpaṭim
1 383, 384n15, 385n19
2 387n35
20 373n92, 392n7, 394n17

Sifra

Baraita de-Rabbi
Yishmaʿel 1:8 464n2

Va-Yiqra 2:5 464n2

Be-Har
1:9 278
5:3 473n2

Be-Ḥuqqotai
Introduction 371n82, 380n133
2:8 476n1

Sifre

Numbers
23 486n2
157 135n47
Deuteronomy
22 325n3
37 244n23
46 30n10
156 489n2
188 85n17
297 400n42

Palestinian Talmud

Peʾah 3:7 457n81

Megillah 1:9 256–60, 277n23

Sheqalim 6:1 263n120, 416

Babylonian Talmud

Berakhot
7a 437nn42–43
28b 29, 69
31a 139n63
32a 411, 412, 414
33b 161
36a 210
55b 81n4
57b 321n4
58a 321n3
60b 31, 322

Shabbat
13b 152n20
30a 129–30
30b 131, 133, 137
55b 318n8
63a 124n5
87a 419
104a 416
105a 127n20
117a 242
147b 268n142
151b–152b 207n2
152a 210n22

Eruvin
21b 126n14
54b 292n91

Pesaḥim
6b 415n51
50a 334n56
54a 244n23

Rosh ha-Shanah
16b 372n84
17b 445n14, 447n32
27a 379–80n127

Yoma
36b 446n23
66b 423n82, 427–28
73b 186n11
75b 319n11
86a 447n28

Sukkah
6b 269n147
20a 295n110
52a 314n18

Megillah
1 259, 277–78, 281
2b 416
2b–3a 258
3a 210n25, 265, 277, 278
9a 281
9b 248
32a 252n75

Moʿed Qaṭan
28a 376n103

Ḥagigah 15b 72n18

Yevamot 62a 419

Ketuvot 111b 126n14

Nedarim 37b 257, 265, 269

Soṭah
17a 466n12
27b 350
31a 47

Giṭṭin 71a 85n17

Qiddushin
14b–15a 384–85n17
20a 386n29
30a 253
30b 377n108
39b 374n98
49a 274

Bava Qamma
38a 34
50a 484n5

Bava Meṣiʿa 62a 473n2

Bava Batra
14a 245n29
15a 242, 257
21b 268n142
91b 490n7

Sanhedrin
4a 269n147
11a 341n42
20b 489n1
21b 491
21b–22a 254–55, 259n95
27b 476n1
34a 128n23
38b 248
56b 250n52
90a 67, 487n6
94a 210n25

Makkot 24a 357–58n5, 370n72

Shevuʿot
21b–22a 186n17

ʿAvodah Zarah
44a 420n72

Menaḥot
29b 126n15, 127n18
30a 242
110a 360n20

Ḥullin 6a 126n14

Midrash Rabbah

Genesis Rabbah
1:4 244n23
9:5 305
9:7 305
9:11 305
10:7 128n26
12:4 307n2
17:8 318n8
18:7 247
20:10 321n4

Genesis Rabbah (*continued*)
31:8 246–47
45:2–3 431
51:3 95n4, 160n7, 180
68:9 439n50
93:6 125

Exodus Rabbah
3:6 333n46
5:19 336
5:20 336
6:4 341n42
30:19 383–84
40:2 402n2
41:6 380n136
42:1 415–16
42:3 411
43:6 413n39
43:7 413nn38, 40
45:2–3 431n10
45:3 432n18

Leviticus Rabbah
10:3 409
18:1 207n2
22:2–4 128n26
32:5 250n56

Numbers Rabbah
19:1 104n16
23:2 127n20

Song of Songs Rabbah
2:9 336
5:11 263n120

Ecclesiastes Rabbah
1:12 465n8

Other Rabbinic Texts

Avot de-Rabbi Natan
14:1 278n28
31:1 244n23

Soferim
1:7 284
6:4 270

Pirqe de-Rabbi
Eliezer 46 459n90

Yalqut Shimʿoni
Exodus 419 465
Numbers 743 415n47
Judges 43 423n85
Psalms 643 34n20

Tanḥuma
Be-Shallaḥ 16 245n30
Mishpatim 1 383n6
7 401n46
Ki Tissa 20 410n24, 411n29
22 411n28
31 459n90
Qoraḥ 4 484n3

Leqaḥ Ṭov
to Gen 9:19 249n51

MEDIEVAL PHILOSOPHICAL TEXTS

Kuzari
I:1 290
12–25 363n31
92–98 405
93 136n52
95 250n55
97 406n5, 406n7, 409n18
II:50 205–6
66 213n43
68 247n39, 249nn47–48, 250n54
70–74 344n1, 348
72 216n4, 267
80 123n3
III:30 264

IV:3 340n34
25 28–29, 73n21, 75, 314n17
V:14 73n21
20 216

Guide of the Perplexed
I:2 312nn12–13
7 351n39
10 328
21 441n59
27 328n25
27–28 274
35 134n42
36 366n51
37 437n41
37–38 441n59
54 438nn47–48
63 332
65 440n56
68 334n57
71 213n43
73 81, 87, 162n11
II:6 100n6
13 374n95
16 363
25 363
29 123n4
33 370n75
III:10 123n4, 180n11
10–12 95n5
12 36n2
22–23 113n15
32 123n4
54 37n15

ʿIqqarim
I:25 467n15
II:18 332n43
24 134n41
26 340n34
31 81n5
III:7 258–59
IV:29 166n28

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